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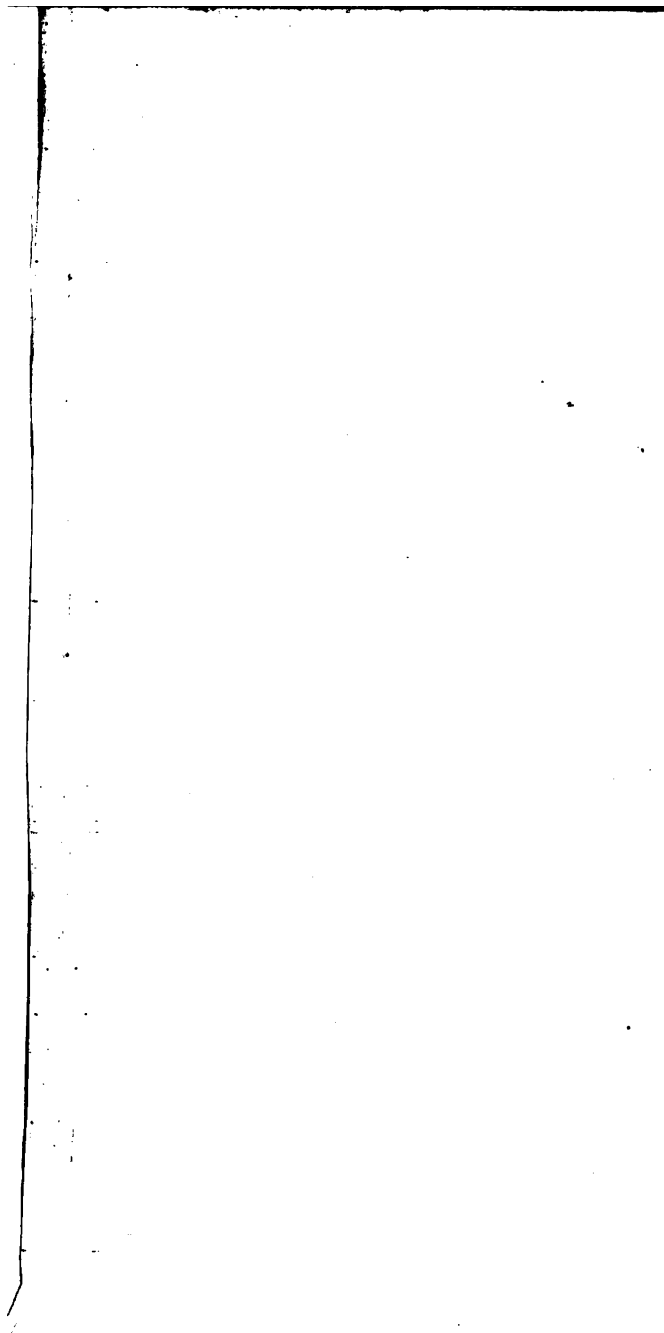
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A  
Chronicle  
of  
Small Beer





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A CHRONICLE OF SMALL BEER



A CHRONICLE OF  
SMALL BEER

BY

JOHN REID



NEW YORK

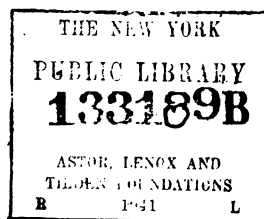
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## A Study of a Father

HE was never part of my real life. If you can imagine a kind of polite nightmare in a black swallow-tail coat and white duck trousers, you have an idea of how for many years he flitted through my dreams. I knew him in the dawn of observation as a vision of enjoyment. I never saw him work. I don't, even yet, find it easy to realise that he ever did work. I think it was his mission in this world to speak. Copious his speech was always, and gracious or exasperating as the spirit moved him.

Sometimes I feel as if I had dreamed him altogether. I lost him out of my youth, as it were, in the break of a dream. Child as I was, I had known for some time that there was trouble in

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the house. It was in my mother's eyes. It was in the air. Things had gone wrong with the bright and beautiful being whose snowy linen and tapered finger nails set him on a pedestal among men. On the wings of popularity he had floated cheerily into a mist of debt. He had condescended to trifle with business as a banker, and he had quarrelled with his directors because his engagements would allow him to give only an hour or two daily to the business of his agency. Unreasonable directors, unreasonable creditors, they pressed him unduly for their own. They worried and wearied his joyous spirit. "I will go abroad," he said, "to find peace"; and he decided to go in the night-time when peace abounds.

I sat up staring in my crib, uncertain whether I was awake or dreaming. In the light of a candle held by my mother, I saw two faces, my mother's set and suffering, my father's with big tears on the cheeks and fear, under a veneer of jauntiness, in the light blue eyes.

"Mama, what is it?" I whispered,

### *A Study of a Father*

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half-choked by the thumping under my red flannel night-gown.

"Say 'good-bye' to papa, Johnny. He is going away for a little."

"Now?" I cried.

The suggestion of imminence was too much for my other parent. He put his arm round my neck. I felt his beard on my face. He was kissing me, and crying in bubbles that seemed to relieve him as they burst.

"Yes, Johnny. Your father is going now, driven away, Johnny—remember that—by cruel men; away across the seas to——"

"William!" It was my mother's voice warning him not to put his secret on a child's mind. The caution pulled him up. He took a fine silk handkerchief from his pocket and gracefully dabbed up his tears. He spoke again immediately in a rich rolling voice, and the roll in it heartened him up at once. He shewed his white teeth in a smile, and the familiar jauntiness crept into the corners of his eyes.

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"Ay, Johnny. Dad's going. He has to run away from you all because wicked men want him to give them what he hasn't got. Who'll 'ride-a-cock-horse' with you now? Who'll read you 'A was an apple-pie'? Be a man, Johnny, and take care of your mother. Mark your father's last words, if he never sees you again—Stick to duty like a limpet, my boy!"

A cab rattled up to the door. My father, who was listening while he spoke, crushed his silk handkerchief into his pocket. I saw this, for, at the moment, my mind was chiefly exercised as to whether the pocket was big enough to hold it.

I didn't seem to realise that anybody was going away; and I was quite stonily passive as my father grasped my hand and wrung it, kissed me again, and with a broken—"There's something for you, Johnny. Take it, and think of me," almost ran out of the room, followed by my mother and the light.

I lay back in the dark and tried to

### *A Study of a Father*

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think it out. In a minute or two the cab rattled away briskly over the stones. I fell asleep, a candle and two faces stamped in wonder on my memory, and to this day the rattling of a cab in the street at night sets my heart beating as it beat under my red night-gown when I lost a father.

In the morning I woke oppressed. A box, his parting gift, lay on my breast. I opened it eagerly. In it was a gaudy cake of shortbread, and on the sugared crust these appropriate words were written—"Frae Ye Ken Wha."

My father never returned to the bosom of his family. He had put me upon the path of duty, and he sedulously left it clear for me to pursue. He was all too fine for the rough work of duty. He was thoroughly clear on the point that society had not done its duty to him, but it never crossed his airy mind that he, himself, had left a duty undone when he had made his own corn and water sure and had raiment fit provided for a person of his social status.



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Twice again I saw him, but he was unreal to me always. I could not take him in earnest. In my boyhood I knew him best from the "Controversy of the Clock." In his youth he had been a Chartered Accountant, and in that capacity it had fallen to him to browbeat a clergyman into paying to a bankrupt estate the price of a church clock that would not go. Years afterwards I found in an old press a minute-book of the correspondence, in which my father, while absolutely wrong, had a thousand times the best of the argument. Only, it seemed to me, that the clergyman reached the same goal somehow by keeping the money, even when he had lost his temper under the lash of his opponent's brilliant sarcasm. I never knew how the affair ended, but my volatile parent sparkled in the fight and spread himself to the wordy war till my cheeks glowed in the reading. If humour, eloquence and verbosity could have conquered right, that dull but honest parson would have paid for his standing clock ; but though

### *A Study of a Father*

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he must have lost much of his self-esteem in the contest, he kept his money in his pocket and so gained the day. The things set down in the volume had their value. They revealed to me the airy serenity of my parent's immorality, and I took him to my bosom as that shadowy thing, "A Study of a Father."

It was thus that I looked at him when, many years later, I met him casually in the house of some relations in the country.

He was greyer, stouter and much fonder of his creature comforts, but he was frank, jovial and sociable as of yore. He liked me, but not at meal-times, for then all his powers were absorbed in feeding himself daintily, and boys have expectant faces when tit-bits are going. He did not see that it was his affair who fed and clothed me. His faith in Providence was absolute; but he felt that it was his duty to tease me slyly at odd moments, and now and then to be very kind to me when, wanting nothing himself, some money was burning a hole in his pocket.

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In my memory the visit is focussed in one gay scene. He took me to a Wapenshaw (archery meeting) on a glorious summer day, feasted me royally in the village inn, gave me pennies to spend on all the ferlies (pretty things) of the fair, walked and talked with me unweariedly from morning till night, and filled my heart to bursting by buying me a bow and arrows like those with which the bowmen shot at the bird hung out from the old abbey tower. By dinner-time next day I had killed a pet rabbit, wounded a turkey-cock, and broken a window in the greenhouse with my cloth-yard shafts. Full of my tale, though sore with the consequences, I tumbled into his room for sympathy and relief. Again my father had folded his tent and silently stolen away.

I took it quietly when they told me, with queer looks, that he would not be back again. I might ere long have doubted that I had ever met him, but the bow and arrows remained with me. They gave me more delight than years

### *A Study of a Father*

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of schooling, clothing, feeding would have done, and long my father's portrait hung on the wall of memory in the gilt frame of that golden day at the Wapenshaw.

I said I saw him once again. He was dead, and he lay in the very narrow doorway to which lead such broad and pleasant paths as his feet had always trod. I did not recognise him in the dead. Grave, silent and stern, the pale face lay in its lying majesty, and all that he might have been seemed imaged in the clay from which his airy soul had fallen away. It was like a funeral in a dream, three mourners and all the signs of grief, but no real sorrow, at the grave of one whose popularity had been his ruin.

Still he is spoken of with affectionate reverence by those who knew him least. They say he was handsome, clever and kind, and a gentleman to his finger-tips. They speak with bated breath of what he might have done. They say he was no one's enemy but his own. At the

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bank he is contrasted with his successor who is not free with the bank's money and is not always raising salaries and giving extra holidays. And the burden of the song they all sing is—"He was such a gentleman."

## A Man's Wife and Me

THE sun shines on the just and on the unjust. It lit up the park slopes, gilded the church steeple, burnished the comb on the policeman's helmet, set the top of the cab on fire, and infused benevolence into the expectant grin on the faces of the crowd. In the radiant drawing-room a priest was making two into the wrong one.

They had told me that I was too young for weddings. "But not for funerals," I murmured darkly to myself, having some thought of shooting him, but no pistol, so that there was little fear of a tragedy.

Thanks to the giant, Parker, I had a front seat outside of the house. To prove his muscle and defy the law, Parker

### *A Chronicle of Small Beer*

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had wrenched off one spike of the iron railing, and where it should have been I sat. My heart was sore, and my seat was both painful and chilly. It did not ease my pain much that the wedding guests were, indeed, poor creatures, looking, in patent pumps and kid gloves, like boys in their Sunday suits on examination day. The one boy who went in was all pride and collar. He grinned superciliously at me. I could only put out the tip of my tongue at him furtively, but it was pleasant to see his gloved fingers squirming towards the stones on the path.

Still the bride and bridegroom tarried. The crowd chaffed, the policeman looked over the head of the whole affair, and "a sorrow's crown of sorrow" weighed on my aching brow. Again I saw her for the first time. It was on a winter day. Her eyes, cheeks and lips were gay with frost-bloom, and smiles hung like mistletoe among the glowing holly of her charms. She looked kindly down out of her furry softness on poor

### *A Man's Wife and Me*

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little awkward me. She found me leaning on our own gate, and guessed at once who I was. Yet did she ask this very thing, and some other things, my answers being much confused by the inward working of love at first sight.

If she did not then feel as I felt, it was cruel of her to stoop down from away up among the top fluff of her boa just to kiss me. I did not ask for that kiss, though afterwards I may have begged for many; and never in vain till that little yellow lawyer came between us.

During one happy fortnight by the sea-side she was mine altogether. Then she read stories to me, kissed me—in public sometimes, and for her sake I bore even that—played “tig,” boated, ay, and bathed with me, so that other boys mocked at me and shunned me as a “girl-boy.” On the Sunday night, which was her last evening with us, she coaxed me upon her knee and—“Do you love me, Johnny?” she whispered.

If Mitchell had been there, I should



### *A Chronicle of Small Beer*

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have died of shame. But we were alone, and she was going away.

With a trembling—"Ye-es," I hid my blushes on her bosom. Then I put my mouth to her ear.

"Couldn't we be engaged, Mary?"

"Do you really mean that, Johnny?"

"Yes, of course. How's it done?"

"Oh, this way," and she kissed me over and over again.

"But isn't there a ring?"

"The gentleman gives the ring, but I'd let him off for a kiss."

"No. That wouldn't be real. Let me up a minute, please! I've got something. I'll make a ring. See!"

From the pocket of my "knickers" I took a coil of lemonade-bottle wire, and on her knees beside me she eagerly helped in the making of that ring. (I wonder if she helped him to buy his.)

I put it on her finger. She touched it with her lips and said it would stay there till our wedding day. Her last words were—"It will wear out, Johnny,

### *A Man's Wife and Me*

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if you don't grow up quick, and somebody else may get me then."

To my uncle's prayer at family worship that night I added a petition for stature. It did little good. I asked twice for gravy and three times for potatoes every day, but that little yellow lawyer gave me just four months to grow up in, and I failed.

So I sat upon an iron railing and remembered, while he stood before the parson with my Mary. Vengeance alone was left to me. In gloomy appreciation I rolled the sweet morsel round and round in my trousers-pocket.

A wild commotion arose at the door. The bride tripped out on the arm of the excited best man. The hubbub ended in a furious shriek of foiled rage as the bridegroom, panting, his coat-collar up, and his face yellower than ever with fear, plunged out upon the gravel, volleyed at with rice and slippers as he ran. The smile with which my Mary turned to welcome him sent the blood to my head. I took the pebble from my pocket, and,

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with all my might, I threw it at the fellow's shiny hat. If I had missed, there were other two stones ; but I could not have missed. In the whole world I saw only that hat. It popped over the lawyer's nose and rolled under the cab. Mary's eye, in search of the assassin, met mine.

"Oh, Johnny," she cried, "how could you?"

The lawyer's glance followed hers. He shook his fist and swore upon his wedding day. I was, indeed, revenged.

Pale, faithless Mary dragged him away while I screamed to the crowd—"She's my sweetheart, not his! Let him fight me for her!"

The bystanders caught fire at my flame, and, in cheering me to the echo, forgot to cry for "bowl-money." The best man crawled under the cab for the hat. The policeman made a pretended rush at me. I fell backward into Miss Gray's little plot, and the kind old maid bore me, frantic and foaming for the fray, into her parlour.

In calmer moments I got still more

### *A Man's Wife and Me*

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even with my seemingly triumphant rival. After the home-coming, I went to his house when he was out and ate up many good things left over from the festivities. Mary told me soothingly how much money he would yet need to give her and what a lot of dresses, and I chuckled to think that he would soon be envying me. I began to suspect that plenty of brides cake might, after all, be better than a bride.

Nor did I only eat his brides cake. Inside of me was still left a corner for offended pride, and Mary, sidling up to me, put an arm about my neck. "Johnny," she said roguishly.

"Umph!" was my answer, but, all the same, I leant up against her.

"Do you like me a little bit—still?"

"Where's our ring?"

"See, there!" As I live, it was on her finger. Oh, that little yellow lawyer! Maybe she thought she might be a widow some day when I was a widower. But I knew better. Still, I liked it.

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"We are sweethearts yet?" I asked with pride in my heart.

"Yes, dear," very penitently.

"Well"—roughly—"kiss me, then."

"There—sweet." A little kiss came between the words and a hug after them.

I stood upon a chair and gave her "one." Then I got away with chocolate in my pocket, claret in my head and a swagger in my walk.

Round the corner I danced a step or two. At each lamp-post I jumped in the air. In every fibre of me I felt the keen joy of being wicked. In bed my thoughts ran—"That poor yellow lawyer! If a boy had kissed my wife, I would have killed him. What a sweet thing is wickedness! You feel all over like a king. You want to be doing it always. Queer, very queer, women are! They marry the other chap and kiss you. One chocolate. I must get to sleep. Can't, to-night. Villains don't say their p——."

It may have been the feast, or not

### *A Man's Wife and Me*

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saying "them," or the lees of sin in my mouth, but all night a little yellow lawyer chased me up the chimney, down the rain-pipe, and in at the bedroom window, with a ruined hat in one hand and a big knife in the other. That is the worst of sin. It tastes sour in the morning when you waken in a sweat.

## Poor Old Thomson

POOR old Thomson ! The sigh is not for the Doctor. He came into the world with a "p" in his name, and, I fancy, a cane in his cold crinkley hand. He is no older now than he was when I was a boy. His foot is as firm at this moment as it ever was, his eye is as fearful, and his brain as free from the cobwebs of thought. Age cannot wither him.

But as for poor old Thomson, he was born old. When he came to the Seminary, as assistant English master, with leave to teach Latin to any small boys whom he could get to pay extra for it, he was himself a lad. But what an old lad he was ! He could count twenty years, maybe, but to get to college he had come through the struggles,

### *Poor Old Thomson*

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hopes and fears of a lifetime. He was thin and very tall, and stooped a little from shoulders that looked like the framework of a strength the builder had repented of attempting to construct. Dark eyes, set deep in the pale, dreamy face, expressed the normal state of his mind and body—want. Lean and hungry, and huddled together in little heaps for warmth and protection, were the hairs of his slight black beard and moustache. Poor old Thomson was as plain as a pike-staff, but when we boys found out that he “did” handsome, we forgot that he seemed ugly and old, and laughed no more at his odd ways.

I was possessed of Satan on that day, I think. Here was a new master who had things to learn, which I would teach him. It was my habit to sit at the top of a class of three, a small certainty the evil effects of which are with me to this hour. It fostered pride and stupidity. Thomson must have seen this when he jocularly told me I was wrong for once.

The moment I had put the “e” before



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the "i" I knew it to be wrong, but the dunce of the class saw it as soon as I did. He snapped his fingers and shouted—"Thief!" My being wrong and Alec Carter right would have won only a smile from any one who had known us both ; but Thomson said—

"Please change places with Carter, White." Now, to be at the bottom of the class was an ignominy I had not endured since my first year in it. Even the Doctor recognised my monopoly in the top.

Carter's alacrity made it worse. He either didn't see the black injustice of the order, or he enjoyed seeing it. By all the rules of pedagogy, I should have gone down, not two places, but one—till the next question, when Carter would again have found his level. My soul rose up in wrath. I went down one place sullenly.

"To the foot," said Thomson firmly. Books were forgotten ; all eyes were now glued upon us.

"But," I expostulated, "we don't do it

### *Poor Old Thomson*

---

that way. You go down 'one' when you're wrong."

"Well, you're wrong again in disputing with me, so down another; please to go."

I decided that this was sheer tyranny rubbed in with humour. I did not then know that Thomson, having seen my "top-of-three" pride, had decided to give it a fall.

My rage swelled till colours danced in front of my eyes. I sat resolutely still.

"Come, come, White!" said Thomson sharply. Through my teeth I hissed—"It's a shame!" This was open rebellion, and all round us the boys were on their feet in an ecstasy of delight.

With difficulty Thomson continued to smile. "Things do happen in this world, White, that don't seem to us fair. 'Yours not to reason why,' but to go down or—take the consequences."

In spirit I was on the field of Bannockburn. I felt the blood come away from my face, but, shutting my lips tightly

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over the ultimatum, I replied—"I won't go down."

"Think a moment, White," said Thomson—"I won't drag you, easy as that would be. I want you to do this because you ought to do it. You're not a dull boy. You can see that my authority must be supreme in the class. You're very angry just now, but when you're calmer you'll be sorry about this. Frankly, I have my reasons for sending you to the foot, but you must take them on trust. I like a lad of spirit, but discipline must be maintained. Now, will you do my bidding?"

"No," I answered stoutly.

I was in a fever. I felt the force of Thomson's quiet appeal, but my pride was in arms. The boys were watching me, and I dared not "hen" the thing when I was fairly in it. Thomson seemed to leave this factor in my stubbornness out of account as I left out of account his need to establish his position as a master.

"Then you will come with me," he

### *Poor Old Thomson*

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said, "to Dr. Thompson. And I am sorry to have to take a boy in for punishment on my first day here. I had hoped we should get on better together. *Do* be sensible, White. I give you a last chance to obey me."

I can now see that Thomson must have felt more anxiety than I did. He had got his post, on trial only, after much effort. The Doctor might have concluded that he was too young to control us. His bread and butter were at stake. He did not know that the Doctor's ever affable tawse was only too eager to be of use in the world.

My hearing and my sight were partially lost in the tumult of my feelings, but I rose sullenly, as the length of the man made it impossible to resist him.

He led me by an arm towards the door amid the sniggers and suggestive gestures of the smaller boys. He was looking down upon me as on a study of humanity, pity blending in his face with curiosity and some admiration. I felt a wave of heat rise into my chest and

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struggle there for passage, a tidal wave of impotent pride and passion, the sort of thing that in men makes criminals. It burst into my brain, and I didn't know any more what I was doing. The boys told me I wrenched myself out of Thomson's grip and flung my open book right into his face.

I knew that I had done something final. For a moment poor old Thomson stood bewildered. Then he cleared his eyes with his hand, picked up the book, and, lifting me by the collar of my jacket, bore me, like a drowned puppy, from the class-room. With the other fellows this display of power eclipsed my heroism, and, because he could take me up as if I had been a puppy, he left the court of their judgment without a stain on his character.

He set me down in the hall to cool, but said no word. Then he marched me into the Doctor's map-hung chamber of horrors,

"White!" said the Doctor, surprise chasing delight over his pink face—"What has *he* been doing?"

### *Poor Old Thomson*

---

"I told him to go to the bottom of the class, Dr. Thompson, for a mistake in spelling. It seems to be the custom here to lose only one place, so White thought it unfair and——"

"Refused to go?" broke in the Doctor eagerly. Thomson bowed.

"Did he? Did he? We'll see about that," and already one hand was fondling the tawse in its pigeon-hole as if it had been a kitten in a basket.

Not a word from poor old Thomson about the book thrown in his face! I had expected to be expelled for this unheard of crime, and as I stood before the Doctor I did not see him but my mother's eyes full of reproach and misery. Was this the duty that my volatile parent, ere he went, had adjured me to do to her?

But poor old Thomson, with a red mark on one side of his nose and a speck of blood on his under lip, said never a word.

How gratefully I took that "twenty" from the Doctor, and apologised for my disobedience. I neither felt the pain

### *A Chronicle of Small Beer*

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nor the humiliation. I was thinking, thinking, thinking of what I had escaped and of whom I had to thank for it.

Poor old Thomson became my hero. Outside of the Doctor's room I begged him to forgive me. Seeing how excited I was, he put his hand on my head, and said, smiling brightly—"You and I will be good friends yet, Johnny. I am glad our quarrel is over. Don't come into the class again to-day. I'll give you a half-holiday, and get your books for you."

Friends? I would have died for poor old Thomson when I felt his big lean hand on my head. An awe fell upon the school when they saw him take out my books. It was settled that I had been expelled.

When I told them afterwards how old Thomson had behaved, it was carried on the spot that the school should demonstrate. At lunch-time on the following day we gathered under the windows instead of spurting for the playground. Thomson came forward to see



"OUTSIDE OF THE DOCTOR'S  
ROOM I BEGGED HIM  
TO FORGIVE ME."







### *Poor Old Thomson*

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what was wrong. He stood there eating his bun, all the dinner he ever had, out of a paper bag, while we wakened the district. Those cheers came from the heart, and Mitchell and I, having sore chests afterwards, had some faint hope of dying for poor old Thomson after all.

The Doctor—"ss-s-ished" us away. Thomson was laughing over his bun, but as he left the window he half took out his handkerchief and thrust it back again hastily as if ashamed of the use he had meant to make of it.

He and I were great friends after this. It became my custom to wait for him when school was over and walk part of the way home with him. It seems to me now that I did not go all the way because I felt his pride and guessed that he was poorly lodged. When he was sure that I was not a little snob, he asked me to come up to his room for a book. It was a poor room in a common street. He did not apologise for it, but I felt his eyes upon me critically, and

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not for worlds would I have let him see any disappointment in my face.

In spite of his reticence, a craving for some kind of sympathy made him tell me that his parents were too poor to help him. I had a suspicion that he was not too poor to help them. A very hunger for knowledge had drawn him to the town. He had no friends, no money. His will to go to college had been his way there. He taught by day and studied by night, reading in his spare moments poetry, for which he had a passion, and anything between the covers of a book. He it was who took me from "Rob Roy," "William Wallace," and "The Scourge of the Antilles," and set me to read "Westward Ho!" Then, seeming to forget that I was not as old as I looked, he gave me "The Idylls of the King." If it had been Greek I would have tried to read it at his bidding. I fear I looked upon it as a classical puzzle, and could not find in it the enchanting stories that he told me in prose and bade me search out in the verse.

*Poor Old Thomson*

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"Over these chimneys, Johnny, what do you see?" he would ask.

"The college spire."

"Well, don't lose sight of it. Go up there some day."

"But I'm going to be a merchant."

"No, Johnny, don't do that. Knowledge is better than gold. Think of it. The day might come when, like so many business men, you wouldn't care to read anything but the newspapers!"

He would set one hand on my shoulder and one on his books, saying—"Go to college, and keep a little poetry in the world and a little light in your soul."

I did not vex him by persisting, but I looked round his shabby room and through the chimneys at the big terrace above the Park, and the Philistine in me turned from poetry to comfort, from "The Idylls of the King" to the daily newspaper. But all the more I worshipped poor old Thomson who did not yawn over poetry and envied no merchant prince.

He was to talk to me again upon this

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subject after the holidays. On the first day of the autumn session as, sunburnt, happy and listless, we turned over ragged old books and discussed new ones, the Doctor came briskly in and said—

“ Well, boys. Glad to see you all back again, with so many others who will share your studies this session. I trust your holidays have made you eager for hard work. You have all got the new books ? That’s right. I will give out the lessons myself to-day. The assistant master will be with us to-morrow. Some of you will be very sorry to hear that your late master, Mr. Thomson, died during the holidays from the effects of a cold caught in Spring, his system having fallen too low to enable him to throw it off.

“ Now, boys, your books.”

Dead ? I leant my head on my hands and looked down into an ink-bottle sunk in the desk. I remembered that cold. When I spoke of it, he would laugh the matter off, give a funny little cough, and

### *Poor Old Thomson*

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say he had got his death this time. His system too low? That meant overwork and starvation. Was college worth it? Poor old Thomson thought it was, and died for his faith. I seemed to feel his big lean hand on my bowed head. "You and I will be good friends yet, Johnny." If I looked up, should I see him bending over me with a comical look of questioning wonder in his sad brown eyes? Splash, splash, in the ink-bottle. Great tears were dropping through my fingers. I rose sobbing like a girl, and going out into the hall, no one hindering me, I leant against my overcoat and "had it out." The big lean hand on my head gave me strength to bear it.

## In the Kitchen

I HAVE a tender memory of the kitchen, my haunt in the gloaming. Looking back, I see it full of soft firelight, with its flushed hearthstone, flaming dish-covers, and gleaming ware. In these old days it was a friendly spot to me, and I am half-ashamed to own that I see it now through a kind of mist that is like poetry. I dream that it might be happiness to sit again in the deal chair by the fireside, with Marget's ghost dumping spectral dough on the well-worn baking-board. If this were too much for the past to give, I would be content with a whiff of the smells that were wont to enrich the air of the hallowed spot.

But there is only the memory.

When dinner was over, it was Marget's

### *In the Kitchen*

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easy hour. Then I came to talk to her, to ask a hundred questions and bide no answer, to claim with my confidences her unfailing—"Losh, keep me!" words that were very dear to my soul.

My old friend's face was not her fortune. Nose, cheek-bones and mouth were all too prominent, and her dull hair was grey at middle-age, bleached by the earnestness with which she swept the floor and blacked the grates. She was short, and work-bent in the back and knees. I have often held her hand in wonder over fingers that could not be straightened and knuckles that might possibly have passed through a curtain-ring. Black was her only wear, not in confession of homeliness, but in the expectation of a death among her kinsfolk. "It's aye safe," she would say, "to have black tae yer haun."

In her expression was a comeliness; and her eyes were like a dog's in their faith and friendliness. She feared laughter as a punishable sin, yet at my call a lost smile wandered, like a ghost in a



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graveyard, about her hard features. As a marksman looks along his rifle-barrel at the bull's-eye, so she looked at duty.

On a certain night Marget was washing dishes at the jaw-box (sink). When she was doing nothing her conscience checked her. With tight-shut lips and leaping eyes, I sat bolt upright in the shiny-bottomed chair by the fireside. The silence was only broken by the clatter of the dishes in the pail and the emphatic ticking of the clock. My soul was on the clock-face, and Marget was furtively watching it over her shoulder. As the hands went round, she came over to the fire and stood on the hearthstone, trying not to smile.

"Ay, an' Man Friday was black? I won'er Crusoe could thole (put up with) him."

It was a cruel question. I twisted in agony, but set my lips like a vice.

Marget tried again—"Ye'll no guess what's in my pocket?"

Had there been a heart in the clock-case the hands would have leapt forward.

### *In the Kitchen*

---

Tears came into my eyes, and Marget repented of her guile.

With a soothing smile she took a half-penny from the pocket, and held it out to me—"It jist wants a meenit o' the time. Tak' it noo, laddie, for ony sake, an' crack awa', or ye'll bu'st."

I leapt from my seat, clutched the reward of ten minutes' silence, and plunged into a voluble defence of Robinson's eye for colour and Man Friday's right to his inherited hue. Into my speech I wrought much curious information; but Marget heard with listless ears that the world was round, and was not startled when I told her that in kindling the fire she was really lighting the gas. Wonders were stirring in her own bosom. Her head was in a creel. At a little word spoken, fate's nail-studded door had flown open in her face. I saw that her odd looks and nervous laughs had little to do with the burden of my tale.

"Are you ill, Marget?" I said.

"*Me*, ill? I'm no sae auld's that yet."

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"You're not listening."

"Ay, am I. Ye was speakin' about salvages."

"It was about Rob Roy."

"Yae black man's like anither. I canna mind the differ. I hae ither things to think about."

I went patiently back over the outlaw's story, and as I talked a strange thing happened. With a feeble little simpering laugh, Marget went hurriedly up to the cracked and spotted looking-glass that hung above the dresser, smoothed down her front hair with a wet finger, pulled her cap impatiently forward over the grey, and, with lips pursed into a wrinkled disc, studied herself with eager eyes. She turned away with a faint, hopeless sigh, but had no sooner got back to her seat than the silly smile settled upon her face again.

I was getting anxious about her, when the door-bell rang. It was a relief to hear in the passage the thick voice and heavy boots of her brother Robert. I liked the ruddy, solemn lad who worked

### *In the Kitchen*

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in a sweetmeat factory, and carried samples about with him.

After peppermints and thanks, Robert said abruptly—"What's this, Marget?"

Marget turned scarlet. "Did mi her no tell ye?"

"Ay, but *you*?"

"Whit for no me?"

"Ye're by wi't. Ye're forty."

"Thretty-nine—no a day inair!"

"The bible says *forty*."

"It's no true."

"The bible?"

"No!"

To this may the most religious be brought by vanity. Robert was struck dumb. But after harbouring Satan for a minute, Marget said uneasily—"If I was forty, I micht be seekit, though you think no."

"Ye're twa auld fules."

"We're nae sic things. I hae jist my place, an' he has twa bairns tae fend (care) for."

"He's efter ye for that."

"He's fond o' me."

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Robert's loud laugh jarred on my nerves.

"Him? The man's fifty. He should be thinkin' o' his bur'al."

"Folk has a heart tae they dee." And then Robert melted like one of his own sweeties, under Marget's dry sobs.

"Haud up, woman! Dinna greet. I tak' it a' back." But Marget refused to be comforted.

"I'll gang to the weddin'," coaxed Robert.

"There'll be nane," wailed Marget.

"Toots, woman, tell me hoo he speer't (asked) ye?"

I pulled her hands away from her face, and forced a peppermint between her lips. "Is it Old Posty, Marget?" I asked.

"He's no that auld," she answered—  
" 'Marget,' says he, 'it's you, or naebody, tae mither my twa bairns. I ken ye fae croon tae caus'ay, an' my heart lippens tae (trusts in) ye.' Whit was I tae say?"

### *In the Kitchen*

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"A doonricht 'no,' I'm thinkin'," said Robert.

"I could *not* say it to the bairns."

"He was cunnin', wi' his bairns. *They* wouldna' hae grut (cried) for yer 'no.'"

"The wee lambies! It's my plain duty."

When Marget got to this point, she became immovable. Robert went away beaten, and I went to bed. I have no doubt that in Marget's dreams an old postman and two babies made heaven on earth that night.

Marget and I announced the engagement to our mutual friends, several of whom were cooks who had a touching professional confidence in the school-boy digestion. We went down into the bowels of the earth, under a tenement of offices, to call upon one old lady. In each window-pane of this wonderful house was an eye. The floor was of pink stone, sprinkled with pounded sugar—or sand, which is much the same thing. Mrs. Pearson's fire and her

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daughter were equally large and glowing. The latter was a hospital nurse, the sight of whom must have been cheering to the poor patients. Her pink ribbons, and white teeth, and ceaseless giggle fairly dazzled me. The old lady was professionally a washer-woman, and while I ate her scones and marmalade, I pictured her as I had last seen her, standing in mouldy boots on a plank, bare-armed, in a cloud of steam, her ragged skirt tucked up to her waist, her face ablaze, and her sinewy hands wrestling with a steaming cotton snake. It seemed a marvellous thing that she could have changed into this prim old dame with the pretty pink house and the prettier pink daughter.

It was decided that Marget should go home to be married. I went to the station with her, Robert being there to carry the box and bring me safely back. We went into a pastry-cook's shop on the way, and ordered a mutton pie and three spoons. We fought over the pie. Each of us wanted to give up his or her

### *In the Kitchen*

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share of it. At length Robert carefully cut it with his penknife into three most unequal portions. The largest fell to me, and the smallest, after a battle, to Marget. But she took a mean advantage of us. We ate ours while she was coaxing her glove to come over her knuckles, and having got it off, she said she couldn't swallow a morsel. I ate her share with remorse, and felt it in my throat when the train moved off.

In the station we sat upon the green box for an hour, accumulating sadness till if one of us moved, tears came into the eyes of the other two.

"Ye'll no forget me, Johnny?"

"I'll come to see you when I'm a man."

"Eh, wull you?"

"And when I'm rich I'll give you——"

"What, laddie?"

"A silk dress, Marget."

"Sirs, what would an auld body like me dae wi' a silk dress?"

"You'll put it on when I come to see you."

"Ay, will I, laddie, if I'm no deed."



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She pressed me to her side, and she could not have been more grateful for the dress if it had been roped up in the green trunk.

Robert and I followed with tearful gaze Marget's woebegone face as it disappeared in the tunnel. Then we went home hand in hand, my mind intent on dress patterns, and his, no doubt, on supper. I had had most of the pie.

The poor silk dress! It is an unpaid debt that I must carry with me into the next world, and it may be out of place to refer to it there. Marget used to love the bible stories, and it may have been imitation that made her, like Hagar, give her husband a son in his old age. No doubt it was an effort to do her duty—as she saw it—by the man. The poor old postman had not her eyes. The event frightened him, and when Marget failed to get well, though she saw that it was her plain duty to do so, he went upon his rounds as one in whom hope is dead. She lay on her back for months, feeble but resolute to do her duty. Though

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her mother was by her side, she ordered the household from her bed. She kept every penny of the postman's scanty pay between the sheets, and doled it out with a niggard hand. I think grief at the expense of being an invalid helped to kill her. The actual manner of her death was curious. Being alone for a time, she took out her purse and fell to counting its contents on the coverlet. A threepenny bit—the trickiest of coins—rolled out of sight somehow. A noise in the invalid's room brought her mother and her husband in. They found her, white and panting, on the floor, groping about and crying—

“My thrup'ney! I've lost my thrup'ney.”

They lifted her tenderly back into bed, where she lay murmuring—“Whaur is't? Hae ye got it? Look ablow the bed.”

The old postman had one in his pocket, and he put it between her thin eager fingers. The rare smile, the lost one, broke over her pinched face. Her head settled contentedly on the pillow.

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"I hae it. Ye haena' lost it by me,"  
she whispered. And so she died, her  
hand with the coin in it pressed to her  
bosom.

## My Grandmama

I BELIEVE my grandmama to have been, with one exception, the woman of the family. When I began to know her well, she had grown stout, and her breath did not always come at need. Nor was the weight upon her spirit lessened by the habit of wearing much superfluous clothing to keep the weather at bay. Often, when it was empty, have I gazed in awe upon her leather belt, which might well have girdled a prize stallion. But her heart was larger than her body. In it were chambers for all the virtues, and a hall for hospitality. She cared not to be alone, and the more there were about her the merrier grew the bright old face. My mother and I were her guests for years, and she could

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not have rested well in her grave if she had not, by her will, fulfilled a last duty of hospitality to us.

We have two portraits of her. In one, the freshest oil painting of its age that I know, she is shewn in the buxom days of her first wifehood, dark-haired, dark-eyed, red-cheeked, sedately smiling. She wears a low-necked black silk dress, a wide lace collar falling upon her shoulders and bosom, and over the collar is thrown a heavy gold chain with pendant locket. In fifty years the portrait has not become old-fashioned. I addressed to it an early effort in verse ending with the avowal—

"I think if I had living been  
When she was young and free,  
There would have been a match between  
My grandmama and me."

In the crayon sketch she is represented in the dawn of a cheery old age, her cheeks still ruddy and her smile livelier than in the first picture, but with hair almost white and a face much lined

## *My Grandmama*

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with action. In her cap are ostrich feathers and she wears handsome jewels. The picture seems to live, and you can almost see the snowy curls shaking in merriment over some caper of one of her many pets.

She was twice married, as the large-hearted will often be. Her first husband was a very perfect gentleman, grave, simple, wise. The second was a poor creature who won her by threatening to shoot himself if she proved obdurate. She gave him her love for a time, and the small luxuries that he needed for life. He did not live long, and after his death she was a graceful but very resolute widow.

The record of her life is one of pensioners and pets. The former she supplied in secret, the latter she acknowledged openly. I have something to say about the pets. Through one of these my grandmama and I became estranged, yet do I solemnly declare that I was not guilty of the outrage attributed to me.

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In the hall of my grandmama's house stood a glass case wherefrom a stuffed spaniel glared stonily at the living cats and dogs that were its successors in the royal favour. In death Flora was but a shabby cur, with patches of hairless skin and legs a good deal awry ; but to have suggested the cellar for the poor effigy, would have been to insult Flora's mistress, whose lashes were often wet as she gazed into the glass eyes of the old padded corpse.

At this time the living favourite was the Newfoundland dog, Neptune, a mischievous giant sent to town to be out of the way of worrying sheep. To tell of the scrapes into which he dragged her was a huge delight to his mistress. She was as proud of him when he shattered the great wall-mirror in a fashionable draper's shop as a mother might have been whose son had won the Victoria Cross by some act of brilliant heroism. The gore that dripped from Neptune's muzzle all the way home on that memorable day was in her eyes the life-blood

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of a hero, and the only effect upon her of paying the damage was that she added the amount to the value set upon her favourite.

She would tell, with tears of enjoyment in her eyes, how she and Neptune went spying in the shop windows one summer day. As usual on such occasions the dog pulled one way and his mistress the other. Now the milliners had it, now the butchers. My grandmother became annoyed at the staring and smiling of the people who passed her. She was used to being looked at when Neptune was with her, but on this day the notice taken amounted almost to insult. She cast side glances at her reflection in the shop windows to see if her bonnet was on one side or her dress out of order. All seemed right, and Nep was following sedately at heel. Yet people stared and laughed till the tears stood in my grandmother's eyes.

A policeman stopped in front of her. Was her unknown offence criminal ?



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"See what yer dug's got, mem! I'm doubtfu' if he cam by it honest."

Down the whole of our most fashionable street, leaving a greasy wake behind him, Neptune had dragged at my grandmother's heels the internal works of a sheep. Nor would he give up his booty to the law. As he stood over it at bay, the gathering crowd shrank respectfully from his muzzle. The gleam of his white teeth set calves aching. For ten shillings a cabman agreed to take home the lady, with her dog and trimmings, which latter Neptune trustfully laid in the lap of his mistress as soon as they were alone together.

The poor dog raided a butcher's shop once too often. It was his habit to steal from one place pigs' feet for which my grandmother paid. He took a fancy to change his butcher, and finding the trotter sweet, came back for another.

"Here, good dog," said the shopman tossing a scrap of steak to him. He caught, and down went the tit-bit.

"Again," cried the malicious rascal,

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and this time threw to the excited dog a heavy iron weight wrapped in mincemeat. It broke his jaw, and poor Nep was so restless in the veterinary surgeon's hands that he had to be shot to be put out of pain. In the first flush of her wrath I think my grandmama would have made up a mince-ball with poison in it for that butcher's supper. He had committed the unpardonable sin, and I myself soon lay under grievous suspicion of having done the same.

My grandmama and I, having been deserted for a time by the other members of the household, became dangerously intimate. I was free of her pockets, and strove hard to be good. Yet I fear that with the "Pilgrim's Progress" on my knee, I have mentally scalped Indians in the backwoods of America. Still, after all, it was only thinking, and to my hand was the cage of mine enemy, Polly. Often had that savage bird lit upon my unprotected head and searched therein with its beak for my brain. If I wore a cap, it would stalk me on the floor and

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striking at my ankles yell deliriously—"Who bit the boots?" This war-cry had been taught it by its mistress when it had utterly destroyed the boots of a visitor. When it was caged, and could not get at me, it would pawkily lower its crest and cry—"Scratch poor poll!" But there was need of sticking plaster if I ventured to touch a feather. For these reasons I would sometimes, with a ruler, keep it climbing round and round the cage till it was madder than a March hare. My grandmother never scratched its head with a fork, but she did not know the bird as I did.

We were alone in the room, Polly and I, when the Old Man entered with an apologetic mew. He was a wicked old Tom-cat who had no latch-key, but did not mind, as he never wanted to get in before the milk came. When his excursions were not amatory, they were martial, and he was scarred from head to tail; yet my grandmother thought him an angel of light and sweetness. The cage was on the tea-table near the cream.

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I filled a saucer and bade the Old Man drink. There was no black thought in my mind. John Bunyan had but slid from my knee.

"Che - che - che!" I said, and stroked the Old Man's seamy sides as he dropped his whiskers in the cream and purred. But Satan enticed that unhappy parrot to the bottom of its cage where it cocked a wicked eye at the Old Man's waving tail. Polly and I exchanged glances. I gently lifted the saucer a little further from the edge of the table, towards which it was being moved in licking. To and fro, to and fro waved the amicable tail. Polly was as quiet as a sleeping baby. I pushed the saucer an inch nearer to the cage. The Old Man hitched back, with a "you're really very kind" sort of purr. His tail just brushed the wires. Polly bit and held on. The cage rocked, the Old Man jumped, and—something gave way. He made a great noise about what Polly kept, but though I was in at the death, my grandmother need not have accused

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me of taking the brush. Save in the way of kindness, I had not laid my hand upon bird or beast, and, excepting that the "Pilgrim's Progress" on my knee was upside down, there was no scrap of evidence against me. If I live to be a hundred I will never give cat cream again.

That parrot came to a bad end. It said—"I see you!" to an Irish maid who was sampling the whisky when the family were at church. She poured a kettleful of boiling water over Polly, and the Old Man was avenged. Had I not been with her at church, I feel sure that my grandmother would have had me hanged on suspicion.

## I Marry in Haste

A MAN lay smoking in a punt that drifted lazily across the bay. Sunshine blazed about him. A heat haze filled the glens ; and pine-trees and mountain-tops climbed out of it like the spires and minarets of a phantom city. On a swelling spur of the Ben the ducal castle thrust its turrets out of the mist, filling the place of the magician's palace in the fairy scene. The man's mind was like the castle, some of it lost in the misty past. On the beach, in the "voe," and about the bay he had been picking up wreckage, chips from the shell of childhood cast there a dozen years ago.

I was the man, and first love had come to me in that enchanted isle. We lived then deep in the heart of the wooded

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glen out of which the burn scrambles, and Katie dwelt, with some immaterial relations, at the entrance to the wood, in the cot which is covered with scarlet runners in summer and filled with rheumatism in winter.

I have not met Katie for years. I fear to meet her. I could not hope to find the little maid I knew, so small and fresh and dainty that you felt as if a glass shade should have been over her. I am still guilty of thinking that Venus must have been a tiny creature, with a saucy nose and merry brown eyes, a wheedling voice and little feet shod with quicksilver. She dazzled me. I could not speak coherently to her, and in our games I did not dare to catch the elf as she danced about me. I longed vehemently to be pleasing to her, but when we met my manner was morose and distant. I heaped attentions on her ugly sister. I have brought to Katie a leaf filled with fresh strawberries picked for her, and with hot cheeks I have asked her to give them to her sister. But

### *I Marry in Haste*

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though she often puckered her small brow over my queer ways, she was so wistfully kind to me that I think she understood.

In the midst of my anguish, William John Sharp landed upon the island and claimed it as his own. This boy had a fat white face out of which eager eyes leapt rather than looked, and his tongue was hung on the double-action principle. He saw Katie and at once, as he said, "chummed it with her." He became her second self, and as his spirits easily overflowed the feeble barrier of his manners, he was often, I hoped, more near than dear to her. But from his activity there was no escape, and though I hated him easily, his friendliness made it difficult for Katie not to like him.

He was always in front of me. Once Katie, tired of fishing, bounded up the glen flinging a look at me in passing that challenged me to follow. I threw down my rod, and made ready for the glorious pursuit. A meteor flashed past me. William John had joined in the



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chase. I stopped short, and an "ugh!" of infinite disgust escaped me as I saw the rowdy fellow catch Katie on the stepping-stones and boisterously kiss her laughing face, while she could not struggle for fear of slipping into the burn.

I felt that William John was ripe for heaven. On earth he was a nuisance. It was possible that angels might endure him. I wondered if Katie had meant that kiss for me, or if it rightfully belonged to the nearest boy.

Something had to be done. I easily decoyed my ever-friendly rival down to the beach and sternly said—"William John, I saw you this morning."

"Lord!" he said, and his mouth fell open; "have I grown any since then?"

My cheek burned. "I saw you kiss Katie," I thundered, "and I've a mind to wring your neck for it."

William John set a kiss on the back of his fat white hand that might have been heard across the bay.

"You little cad!" I roared, diving at his collar. He dodged, and crying—



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"Ho, it was your kiss, was it? Never mind, I'll easily get you another," he snatched my straw hat from my head and sent it skipping out to sea. As he dashed away he yelled—"Booby, find your own hat and your own kisses. Good-bye!"

White with rage, I hung an instant between my hat and my hate. William John skipped through that crevice, and I have never seen him since. He had found his courage in the packing that was going on at home. I fear that were I to meet him even now, I would put on my gloves and pull his nose in memory of the past.

I dreamed away the autumn of that year in sweet misery. On the dark nights I prowled in ever-narrowing circles round the town house that held my Katie. The policeman on the beat was haunted by a small, thin boy whose buttoned-up jacket covered a hungry heart, and whose face was ever striving to express the gloomy grandeur of his love-lorn soul.

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Square grooves in the masonwork ran along the front of Katie's house. From the doorstep I could climb upon the area rail, and, with fingers in a groove, hitch along the wall and hang like a bat beside the parlour window. Here, one night, I hung, watching Katie feeding the cat, when a light blazed on me from behind. The haunted policeman, gathering my nether garments in the hollow of his hand, set the trembling spectre on the steps beside him.

"You wee teevil, phwat iss it al apoot?" he said.

As I made no reply, he flashed his light in my eyes and shook me with the gentle persuasiveness of his cloth.

"Is it ta offiss you want?"

"Oh, no! Please, no!"

"Phwat wass you doin' there?"

"I was just looking, please."

"Ye wass keekin', an' phwat wass you keekin' at? Mind phwat you say, noo! Pe careful!"

I had not the courage to tell a lie with

### *I Marry in Haste*

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the prospect of having to swear to it on the bible.

"*She* lives there, sir," I said, "Katie—my sweetheart." At the moment I think I was ashamed of Katie. It occurred to me, too, that I had perhaps claimed her somewhat openly and prematurely.

The big policeman rumbled within, and slowly passed his light up and down my small person.

"Ah-ha," he chuckled, "you wass after the lasses, wass you, ma wee man? It's no many kisses you will get for preakin' your wee legs doon her stank (area). Ne'er fash yer thoom apoot the lasses, an' some day you will get mor' kisses than will pe goot for you."

At any moment Katie might have come to the window. "Oh, let me go!" I pled eagerly.

"Ay, aff wiss ye, tae yer ped. An' if ye come keekin' here ony mair, I'll dust yer jaicket tae ye. Pouf, awa'!"

I went like the wind, and except on business I came no more upon that

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policeman's beat. Instead, I took to watching Katie in church, and when she caught my eye I longed to get under the bookboard.

At Christmas I went to a party in her house. That was a magic night. At supper-time came the flood-tide of my affection. In exchanging cracker mottoes under the table we squeezed hands. So strong an impression has that night left on my mind that to this day I think of love as a state of perspiration in which the modesty of the soul oozes out at the pores of the skin.

I cannot otherwise account for my action after supper. We played charades, and in one a boy dressed as a clergyman married me to Katie, taking the words of the service out of a prayer-book that he had found. We duly made the responses, and I put a curtain-ring on Katie's tiny finger. Then the girls began to tease my bride. They said we were actually married, by Scotch law. They insisted upon this till Katie became seriously alarmed. She probably saw

### *I Marry in Haste*

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herself in future years desired by dozens of eligible bachelors, but, alas, tied for life to a boy.

She appealed to me—"We're not really married, Johnny, are we?"

"Katie," I said positively, "this is Scotland. I took you, Katie, and you took me, John. We are married till death do us part. And I forgot to kiss you at the right time, but I'll do it now——" and, before them all, shorn of my native modesty by love, I took my Katie round the neck and kissed her sweet mouth.

The next moment I lay upon the carpet longing for a divorce. My supple and vigorous bride had hit right out from the shoulder and sent me to ground like a nine-pin. There I lay, the centre of a tittering crowd, knocked down by a girl! I could not rise for shame.

Her father, a great, stout man of dictatorial mood, cried—"Katie, go to bed!" She was standing over me, her eyes flashing with rage, and turned to explain, but again the voice boomed

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forth—"Katie, go to bed!" The proud beauty burst into tears and went. Was it a divorce, or only a judicial separation? Is it a doubt as to this that keeps us single, or were we cured of the desire to marry by that night's experience?

## An Uncle in a Mist

ONE feels cosy in a mist. It blots out so many ugly things, and sets a crown of softness and dignity on the plainest landscape. 'Tis well that mist always hangs about the past. So the dullest eyes looking backward have some simple sorrow in them.

The silver spoon was not in my mouth when I was born ; but it was a joy to me in my cradle. It was more to me than a twin, since it was even named after me. The word "John" is graved upon it in German capitals, and the puzzle of my extreme youth was that scratches should mean so much. The spoon was Uncle John's christening gift, and it has been a talisman in my life. In awe-struck contemplation of its beauty



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and solidity, I came to look upon the giver as a being of infinite goodness and power. It may be that my judgment of Uncle John's character is still warped by my early investment of him with the attributes of Providence. That spoon disposed my heart to gratitude, and the possession of a piece of solid silver nurtured a gentle dignity in my manner. In the valley of humiliation I have found comfort in the thought that, at least, I had a solid silver spoon with my name engraved upon it.

I admit that the mirror of solid silver in which I first beheld Uncle John may have been unduly flattering to him, but you shall see him with clear eyes. Here he is, in this dumpy leather case. It is the portraiture of the past. The artist's cunning hand has helped the sun to paint. In this case man's work has survived nature's, and the fading out of the lines has left an effect that suggests a ghost hiding behind a scheme of colour. The spectre has red cheeks and blue eyes, and its waistcoat is a study in green

### *An Uncle in a Mist*

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and gold. There must have been gold left over, for I do not think my uncle could with safety have worn all the rings, lockets and alberts with which his portrait is adorned. Through this work of art you can see a cheery-looking, easy-going gentleman, with very little hair and somewhat puffy cheeks, a smile at home upon his lips and a tell-tale thumb in the arm-hole of his flowered waistcoat. My uncle's fortune and ambitions being small, he may have been a little pompous, which in my eyes only made him the liker to Providence.

The brevity and extreme pleasantness of our acquaintance bred in me a lasting hunger for every scrap of information about my attractive relative. I first became conscious of his existence during the harlequinade of a pantomime to which he had taken me. No doubt he had before that lavished many attentions upon me, but he became to me a personality on that unforgettable night. He was born in the transformation scene, and I find it difficult to think of him apart from

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leaping clowns, flattened policemen, and sausages. Of the performance I only remember these features, and in this grotesque frame the pathos of Uncle John's short life must ever be set in my memory.

My grandmother never wearied of telling me about Uncle John, and though most of her stories have slipped from my memory, those that stand firm loom out of the mist with a fantastic importance that deepens as the years go by.

When he was a lad at a boarding-school, he wrote to his mother that he would bring with him, for the holidays, a friendless little fellow whose parents lived in India. Proud that he should choose his friend so unselfishly, my grandmother set the best room in order as if for a lord. It had not squared with Uncle John's idea of magnanimity to refer to the complexion of his guest, and when he turned up black, it took all the warmth of her motherly heart to hide my grandmother's confusion. Others of the family were less tactful, but Assiz

### *An Uncle in a Mist*

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Achmed had become case-hardened at school, and he was soon like a black kitten in the house. A white boy would not have been cuffed so much, but neither would he have been endured so long. It became a business to show Assiz Achmed off and to protect him from insult, his impishness making the latter department a busy one. He it was who squeezed himself between the bars of the larder window and stole the apple-tart. His oriental subtlety suggested taking the paste off whole with a pen-knife, filling the emptied dish with water, sticking the paste on again by moistening the edges, and putting the tart back on the shelf. He alone kept his countenance when my grandmother surveyed the watery waste within, and his was the plate that was put in for "a little piece of the paste, please." Assiz was taken to the seaside with the family, and the boys tipped him overboard from a small yacht, in full confidence that a nigger could swim like a dog. The theory fell to the ground on the spot, and the diffi-

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culty of bringing the subject of the experiment to life again was such that my grandmother resolved, mindful of his Indian parents, to put him promptly beyond the reach of Western science. He went away laden with gifts and bathed in tears, and was straightway forgotten by all save Uncle John, who wrote to him every Friday for rather more than a week.

Among my grandmother's treasures were the rim of a policeman's helmet and three special constable's batons, proofs that Uncle John had been "a little wild in his day." The helmet-trophy was spoil snatched in a snow-balling fight in the grand days of the Old College. The University knows no such follies, but old Doctors of Divinity still live who cherish in secret pigeon-holes similar unhallowed reminders of their callow days. My uncle had got the batons at the time of the Fenian scare; and with mirth dancing in her eyes my grandmother would explain that having one for the middle of his mantel-

### *An Uncle in a Mist*

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piece, John could not rest till he had one at each end also, so fierce and resolute was his patriotism. It was but taking three oaths in a good cause.

Poor Uncle John was met at the gate of his manhood by a small competence. It made him an idler for life. He set about seeing the world as a cabin passenger, and in time he was looked upon as only a visitor at home. His way of life fascinated me. A book of gay costume-sketches marked his path through Russia and Asia Minor. He was in the Crimea while the guns still smoked in the trenches and the pride of conquest crowned every Briton. My grandmother had a pile of faded letters in his ladylike hand, the only fruit of some years spent in New York. The proud old lady thought them "quite worth printing."

In his angel visits to our town Uncle John made himself very popular. He had seen the world, read books, and met personages. His slight natural pomposity accepted, he gave himself no airs at all.

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His money and his experience, so far as they went, were equally public property. His mind may have been a kingdom to him, but with the instincts of a traveller, he got outside of it as often as he could. He gathered young and old, rich and poor under the wings of his gentle sociability. And so little selfish was he that at a dance he would be found neglecting youth and beauty to waste his sweetness on married folk and wall-flowers. This obstinate transgression of the common rules of society set many bitter tongues wagging very sweetly about him. Dead leaves of affection fluttered about his friendly feet and whispered of his chivalry to the winds. The family held up its head and felt that it had done the work of three generations and produced a gentleman.

On my word, I think it had ; he took things so very quietly. At breakfast one morning a letter was brought to him. He read it slowly, finished his coffee, and rose from the table with a little joke on his lips. He said he was going to

### *An Uncle in a Mist*

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his own room to smoke a cigarette. My grandmother looked up at him anxiously. Once he had said the same thing when he had felt one of his sudden faintnesses coming on. But his smile was reassuring as he went gently out of the room.

He was found sitting in his American rocking-chair, his hands behind his head, a burnt-out cigarette between his teeth, the daylight meeting his glazed blue eyes. From his crossed knee a letter had slipped to the ground. In it he was called an idle fellow, and told that the writer had never taken his love-making seriously. His "loving and riding away" was spoken of as probably no new experience in the gay pilgrimage of his life, and the news was gently broken to him that a worker had pushed the drone out of his corner in the human hive.

The pity of it was that poor Uncle John, who would have given a worm the crown of the causeway, should have had such a bad quarter of an hour for his



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last on earth. I wonder if the girl who laid her cruel little hand upon his gentle heart ever knew that she had stopped its beating.

## “Daring” a God

THE palatial Crescent and the respectable Terrace turn their backs on the Lane, but though held at arm's-length by their long greens, it makes itself quite at home in their company. It is a quiet lane. Stables are dotted on the Crescent side of it, but only one here and there is put to its proper use. The chief intruders upon the solitude of the Lane are coal-carts and boys. In wet summers it is overgrown with grass, and a very imaginative person standing where, owing to the curve of the Crescent, the ends are out of sight, might think himself in the country.

At the east end of the Lane, when I was familiar with it, a large square of vacant ground was waiting for its ap-

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pointed crop of stone and lime. This open space served as the school playground, and there, on a frosty September day, we held a knightly tournament. The lithe fellows mounted on the backs of the sturdy rode a-tilt at each other. The object of the game was, as in the lists of old, to dismount the opposing champion. Buttons flew in the fray, neck-ties and collars strewed the ground, and indestructible tweed suits proved their frailty. Blows were beginning to fall in earnest, and the blood of at least one nose was crying out for vengeance when Mitchell burst out of the Lare, his jacket buttoned over a secret that he was dying to impart to us.

The combat ceased, as if the king had thrown down his truncheon. Men and horses thronged round Mitchell to hear the import of his tale.

"I say—I say!" he gasped, then pulled up with the question—"Is Gibby Buxton here?"

"No!" we shouted.

'Then, here! Come close! What

### *"Daring" a God*

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d'ye think Old Buxton's got in his stable ? "

" Old Buxton " was a Roman Catholic gentleman, just returned from India, who had sent his son to the " Seminary " on the devil's bargain that he was not to attend the Bible class.

" A monkey ? " guessed one.

" A nigger ? "

" A lion ? "

" A mummy ? "

" A corpse ? "

" Worse ! " groaned Mitchell.

" A woman ? " I suggested timidly.

" *Much* worse ! "

" Do tell, Mitchell ! Tell *me*, any way. What is it ? "

" What do you think," he answered, in a hoarse whisper that chilled our marrows, " of an idol ? "

We did not look creditably horrified, and Mitchell grew hot with anger at our apathy.

" The thing's a False God," he cried, indignantly, " and what does any sane man do with a False God ? He bows

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down. before it, and worships it. Now, I'm not the sort of fellow to stand that. I'm not stuffed with the Catechism, like some of you, but this is a Protestant country, and I say—'Down with idols!' That's my religion, and I'll let Old Buxton see it."

Mitchell's eloquence prevailed. The religious tiger in us was roused. With one accord the school cried out for a crusade against the False God. Sometimes boys "get religion" very badly. I knew one who, in a fit of this sort, went alone to church three times on a certain Sunday. When the family filed into the pew next week, the meaning of the "revival" was displayed in Roman capitals on a yard of the bookboard. Satan had got at him, through his new knife, even as he sat in the gates of Zion.

As with most crusades, so with ours. No doubt Satan had a finger in the pie, and that finger, I fear, gave to the dish its flavour.

The day after the tournament was

### *"Daring" a God*

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Saturday, which is the school-boy's Sabbath, wherein he does no work. I, at least, had spent the preceding night in chasing idols up and down the banks of the Ganges. They were stumpy things that trundled funnily along without legs, and hopped up on roof-tops without wings, and melted into blue fire when my sword pierced their jewelled paunches. When we met for action in the Clifton Woods at dusk, the fury of the night was still upon me.

These "Woods" were the *pro indiviso* pleasure-ground in front of a neighbouring terrace. We thought little of them in the summer days when we could see through them and round-about the shrubs; but in the dusk of the September evenings fancy ran riot among the shadows of the Woods, and on the darker nights it was a fearful joy to peer into the inky blackness out of which the tall tree-tops climbed, tremulous with mystery.

If Buxton's idol could have seen the host mustered to give battle to him, he

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would have made shift, even without legs, to go home to India. A blue silk-paper helmet surmounted Mitchell's coal-black face. He had turned his jacket outside in, and arranged a red comforter as a sash. His lost legs were in his father's fishing boots, the superfluous folds of which hung about his thighs and gave him the look and gait of a baby rhinoceros. In his belt were a rusty pistol, a wooden sword, and a large door-key, prized for its clink. One hand grasped a Bible, the other a cross of white lath and a bag of pease-meal.

I wore a red Garibaldi and a scarlet Kilmarnock night-cap, with warlike trimmings. We all carried lath swords and had our faces carefully blackened. The humblest soldier in the ranks had, at least, borrowed his sister's feather hat or abstracted a pot-lid from the kitchen as a shield. It was certainly a gay and glittering throng that took the field against Buxton's idol on that memorable day. Our black faces glowed with military ardour and holy zeal, and Peter the







"YAH, YE OLD GOD, YE!  
I DARE YOU TO  
BLAST ME NOW!"



### *"Daring" a God*

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Hermit, in his day, was a small man compared with Robert Mitchell as he headed his own crusade against the Crescent and the God it harboured in a stable. Being a God of wood, he could not see through the stable door, nor hear the penny trumpet and the shilling drum. He was delivered into our hands.

We set a three-legged stool under the air-hole in the door, and at the opening Mitchell shewed, first, the cross, then the Bible, then his own black face.

"I see it," he shouted, "I see it! It's on a box in the middle stall." Then, emboldened by the enemy's tameness, he added—"Yah, ye old God, ye! I *dare* you to blast me now!"

His face was at the hole, his body bent eagerly forward. The temptation was irresistible. I gently raised the tail of his jacket. Boys are not without intelligence. Beefy Brown needed no spoken hint. His eye glittered. He swung his flail-like arm. The scouts at each end of the lane were startled by the loud report. I thought I heard the God

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laugh in his stall. The cross, the Bible, and Robert Mitchell lay at his feet together, and for one awful moment Mitchell was certain that he had been "blasted" in answer to his impious "dare." He afterwards tried, poor fellow, to join in the laugh, but his nerves were shaken and he had somehow "lost the lead."

The stool was set up once more, and turn about we pelted that poor painted God till he reeled again. He met his fate like an Indian gentleman, as immovable under mud, clods, flour and pease-meal as he had ever been when deluged with the homage of the faithful. No Christian could have behaved better. I do not know an elder of the Church capable of wearing so sweet a smile when a half-brick had carried away his nose.

But this placid braving of the cross was too much for us. We lost our temper over it, and broke the stable window to get better at him. So, too, in hot forgetfulness, we cheered when

### *"Daring" a God*

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Mitchell, again drunk with holy zeal, knocked him from his box with a coping-stone torn from the opposite wall.

Prone upon his face he fell in the gutter. We had laid the False God low, and already we were sorry for it. Wrapped in his mantle of dignity and patience, he posed upon a loftier pedestal than the empty deal box from which he had fallen. And as windows were thrown up on every side, and the whistle of the scouts pierced the gloaming, we fled from the scene as murderers run from the body, which, nevertheless, runs with them.

Sunday was wretched with apprehension, and the policeman who came into the class-room with the Doctor on Monday morning could almost have picked out the culprits by their colour. When, after the Doctor's impressive address upon law and order, my tremulous treble ventured to protest—"Please, sir, we were not destroying property. We were smashing an idol," I fancied I saw a stony smile under the majesty of learning

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and the law. But five little Buxtons were in the nursery, and a half-crown was in the policeman's pocket. The altar of justice reeked for a victim.

"Who was the leader in this scrape?" said the Doctor, fixing an evil eye on me. All was lost save honour.

I looked hard at Mitchell. He could not have been more absorbed in his ink-bottle if a fly had been drowning in it.

"Craven!" I said in my heart, while my fingers itched to grasp the crown of martyrdom. I was framing a heroic sentence that would suck up all the glory of the situation and make me a hero for ever, when, with unparalleled meanness, Mitchell quietly said—"I was the leader, sir. I saw the idol first."

A murmur, that was like a smothered cheer, ran round the benches, and Mitchell swelled into a turkey-cock with the glory that should have been mine.

"And were you there, too, White?" asked the Doctor, slow to take his evil eye from the spot where it had once settled.

*"Daring" a God*

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"Yes," I said, meekly, for another  
had secured the halo.

"Come with me, both of you."

Mine was a hard fate, to share the  
pain and not the glory. As the blows  
fell I heard a wooden laugh in the air.  
It couldn't have been the Doctor. It  
must have been the heathen God.

## The Glee of Death

It were unchristian to deny that a school-boy has a soul. The thing is asleep in him as the butterfly is in the chrysalis, but you would smile if it were suggested to you that this sleeping soul could put him to the torture. Mine, then, must have been a monstrosity, since out of a dark night, a strip of bedroom, and a tent bedstead it could make a hell.

When the stars looked in upon me, I would feel God's eyes piercing to my heart and ache with shame for what they must see. Yet, in falling asleep, I took comfort in the thought that they would watch while I slept.

On pitch-dark nights, when neither kind words nor kind faces had brightened the day, and when, possibly, I had

### *The Glee of Death*

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done some mean action or told a lie, my soul would make itself felt. Then loneliness, the fear of death and hell would take hold upon me, and, with my heart shaking the bed and a cold dew on my brow, I would clutch the pillows to make sure that I was living, and bite my tongue to keep from crying aloud. Thus I would pass hours in trances of terror, thinking of God, death, and eternity; and peopling the darkness with shapes of wrath. Had I given less time to reading, and more to cricket and football, I should probably have slept better and seen fewer phantoms in the darkness.

It had been my lot to see the dead more than once, and the cold, waxen faces would in the night hours rear themselves about my bed, the conviction creeping in upon me that I was about to die—to die alone in the night, without a word of farewell or the touch of a human hand; to die in sin, hopeless of heaven. I would picture myself lying dead, contorted, glaring, as the man had



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lain that I had seen killed in the docks. The fear of hell was not the core of my agony. I was most moved by the feeling that I was dying without having lived. I longed to keep life, and felt it slipping from me in the dark. I prayed that, if it were to be, I might die a romantic death in the daylight. The night and the loneliness being gone, I felt as if the weight of sin might be lifted and I might die as boys do in story-books, hearing the angels singing and longing to join the choir.

I would not have cried out even if the dead had actually touched me, but any one who had come into my room in these long hours of suffering, would have been welcome as an angel from heaven. I have never, till now, spoken of these night agonies, and I do so here simply to show how I shrank from death until I actually experienced it.

I had been working hard for a school prize and had practically gained it when, one afternoon, I came home sick and sore. Leadен eyes made scroll-work of

### *The Glee of Death*

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the letters, and my bones ached in an easy chair. With both hot hands I could just keep my head upright. At tea-time I tried to eat and drink a little, but the inner man churlishly rejected every morsel of food that was offered to him. I looked at my mother and smiled feebly. She sent at once for the doctor, while, almost laughing, I pondered over the fix old Dr. Kinghorn would be in if he could get nothing to stay in me. That, however, I said to myself, was his affair, not mine.

The doctor entered in a fog, shook his head in smoke, I thought, said something faintly about fever and congestion that frightened my mother, and, for a moment, alarmed even me. Dreamily comfortable, I was conscious of being put into bed. There I chuckled over the doctor's efforts to hear, through a horn, the fever running about inside of me. But my breath grew very short, and though my senses kept awake, my body went heavily to sleep. The gravity

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with which Dr. Kinghorn faced my mother amused me.

"What is it, doctor?" she asked.

"There is congestion, and it looks like fever. He's very weak, poor laddie. He may pull through if he has a good nurse. Shall I send you one?"

"Do you think I would let—?"

"You'll catch it—sure."

"I'm not afraid. And I'm certain he'll pull through. I know his constitution. I'll put my faith in God, and in you, doctor."

"And a little in yourself?"

"Well—yes!"

"To work then. Get him into a larger room where you can have a bed also. And for the next two hours poultice him front and back every ten minutes."

They went out of the room together, while I lay cheerily reflecting that my mother was probably prejudiced. Very likely I would not pull through. She knew my constitution, but not that my head was splitting and my brain whirling

### *The Glee of Death*

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round, while my breath was getting harder to draw every minute, and the conviction of coming death was settling lightly down on my mind. I did not fear it now that it was really come. I was curious as to how I should pass from life to death, and eager to get it over before the poulticing began.

But that was not to be. My mother and the maid appeared, and hurriedly put the fiery things on my back and breast. When, after the first pang or two, I ceased to feel them, I felt sure that I was dying. Sensation left me. I became a spectator of my sufferings and of the efforts made to relieve them.

I heard the parlour furniture being knocked about, felt myself lifted with the mattress to the floor, saw my bed taken to pieces and the pieces carried away. A flood of lightness and joy entered into me. It was as though my being were like a silk envelope distended with life that would shortly burst the fragile covering and go free. I lay in a

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languorous waiting for the luxury of death.

I heard my mother say—"Just let us carry him, mattress and all." So four of them raised me, and as we bumped the door in passing I felt indignant. I thought it a shame to use a poor, dying boy so roughly. It seemed needless cruelty thus to disturb my last moments when my soul loathed movement and I longed to lie in peace. It was not nice to die between mustard blisters.

The mattress slipped. My heart gave a frightful flutter, something snapped, my life rushed out of its envelope. The fears that had lain upon my spirit fled and their place was taken by a delightful feeling of being out of it all.

"Ho—ho!" I thought, "they do not appear to know that I am dead. They are blind, or busy, or I seem to be living still. Dead I am, for I neither feel nor hear. I am lighter than a feather and happier than a king. It is an easy thing to die. They may knock my body about and blister it. I enjoy looking on."

### *The Glee of Death*

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My last feeling was one of humorous pity for my mother's vain devotion. Then came a total blank into which I sank without hope and without fear.

I believed myself dead, so absolutely that a more real death can never come to me. I ought not to shrink from it when it does come. I have learnt that the way out of the world is an easy one, a numb descent into unconsciousness, a mild curiosity being the only active sensation.

In a dead silence I came to life again, with limbs like lead. I thought myself in a tomb and took the sheets for my shroud. Through my glued eye-lids I saw a strip of light that cut the darkness. I received with incredulity the hope that I might be living. Then came the daylight, and my mother in a pale ecstasy. I spoke feebly, and my blackened lips closed hungrily on the rim of a cup. I took the joy of life to my bosom with some surprise but more satisfaction.

I was a skeleton, but a living one. My bones rattled to the tune of life, and

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though the doctor still shook his white head over me, my mother and I rested confident in the appetite that was becoming a torment and a delight to me. I smack my lips yet over the flavour of that bread and butter ; and often since, with an insipid cup of afternoon tea at my lips, I have longed to taste the nectar that I then drank out of bowls.

Happy, sleepy days, and cheery evenings in the big arm-chair ! My mother would sit beside me sewing, tempting me with wine, grapes, and little things meant to fill up crevices within me, while the firelight took us both into its heart. I would fall a-nodding over the "Arabian Nights," seeing in the embers princesses, magicians, caliphs, one-eyed calenders, cheese-cakes, kabobs, sherbet, and all the motes that dance in the magic air of Bagdad.

As I came out from the shadow of death four delights met me, my mother, my appetite, the firelight and the "Arabian Nights."

### *The Glee of Death*

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They are the colours in a rainbow that spans my memory, and the bow is outlined upon clouds so black that I can scarce persuade myself that they were ever in the sky.



## The Queen of Beauty

My Aunt Jane wore her frocks quite plain on the angular stretcher of her figure, and her speech, like her skirts, was free from frills and flounces. Under her straight eyebrows her bitter eyes were sunk in the bilious skin that was drawn tightly over the bones of her skull. Her will and her way were in close relationship.

That I might be out of the way, I had been sent to spend my holidays under her virgin roof. The plain, two-storied house stood square and firm on the main street of a market town. By standing inside the net curtains, and flattening your nose on the glass, you could see the lamp-lit doorway of the Black Bull from the window of the faded

### *The Queen of Beauty*

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drawing-room. Once a year, when the county pirouetted within its panting heart, the sleepy inn woke up into delirious life.

Aunt Jane had gone—save the mark!—to the County Ball, attired in a black silk dress with yellow stripes round it. I had seen the maid struggle with the laces of her stays. Striped black and yellow, and nearly cut in two, she looked like a wasp; and the sting was there, though sheathed, to be out of the way in dancing.

Dancing? Aunt Jane dancing! I stood at the window long after the last wheels had rolled from under the Black Bull lamp, and tried, for dear life, to imagine Aunt Jane at the ball. Would she sit all night on a form, bolt upright against the wall, glaring at the pretty ladies, the gallant gentlemen, the stout yeomen, and the dashing soldiers, till they all felt creepy and glanced fearfully as they swung past the skeleton at the feast? Or would swain be found brave enough, or blind enough, or kind enough

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to span the wasp waist and hold her awful olive smiles close to his bosom? And being found, would he see her grim face as I saw it in the black window pane, and lead her to a seat ere the floor was all their own and while her rigid clutch could be loosened from his arm?

Whether she had been fairy or wall-flower, my dear aunt was ill on the morning after the ball. There were no lessons, nor raps with the pointer for me. So, at my ease, I hunted a bluebottle fly that vainly sought a royal road through the parlour window. I had him in a corner, when down the sleepy street came running troops of boys, hot, and with eyes to the rear. Unearthly music clashed and blattered in the air. A thin crowd of the people who will be first in everything streamed past. The throng grew, and the noise became deafening. I threw open the window, and leant out till I nearly fell over upon the solid floor of heads below. I saw six piebald ponies drawing a gilded carful of prosperity, embodied in red-faced gentlemen with

### *The Queen of Beauty*

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white hats and trumpets, who tooted right merrily. An elephant followed, crowned with a negro, and having a table-cover laid upon his back. Then camels lurched scowling through the crowd ; and after these rode the Queen of Beauty. My heart ! My heart ! It beats to the memory yet.

Six stout horses drew the creaking, flower-heaped car, whereon her gilded throne was set. A lion, which she kept from the throats of the lieges with a silken cord, slept at her dainty feet. It may have been chloroformed, but the policeman who steadied himself by the lamp-post while it was on his beat, did not know this, any more than I did.

I can believe that she was only a little pale-faced child. But, on that high throne, in lonely grandeur, a tawny terror at her feet, the calm splendour of her bearing amid the tumult of the scene stamped her image on my heart for ever. She sat among billows of muslin, a wreath of white roses on her long dark hair, her slender arms bare to the shoulder, her

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small pink slippers touching the lion's heaving flank. As the carswung along, she looked at the crowd with a scornful smile in her dark, sleepy eyes, and bowed from side to side like a queen. She saw my spell-bound face at the window, and, with a little merry laugh, touched her lips with dainty finger-tips, and blew into my heart a kiss that is there yet.

The pageant passed away. It left me sad, and wondering if it were worth while to live as a common schoolboy. I doubted if the Queen of Beauty would have blown that kiss to me if she had known that I trembled before a bony aunt.

"Tinkle — tinkle — tinkle!" The silver hand-bell of a sick virgin voiced her need of me.

I subdued my steps at her chamber door, and knocked politely.

"John!"

"Yes, aunt."

"Come in—quietly."

Of course, Mary had set the little table at the back of the door, and a tiny shove,

### *The Queen of Beauty*

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with the toe of my shoe, sent it over. Then came a fuss, and screams, and Mary with towels, all for a drop of water on a bed mat.

An aunt in bed is very funny. The poets that write about rounded limbs on virgin couches, and the sweet purity of a maiden's chamber, should have seen my aunt's bones sprawling under the bed-cover. A sheet hung on a paling to dry, with the points sticking up under it like the teeth of a large saw, is like the thing; only there are more points to a paling than my aunt had of elbows, knees, and shoulders. But the image will do to set forth her toothy look under the mat. She wore a night-cap, and was bilious from the ball, and he must have been a grand poet who could have addressed a sonnet to my aunt among the pillows. Wisps of wiry grey hair stuck out of the night-cap, and a skinny hand feebly groped for her purse under the bolster. It came discursively into my mind that perhaps it would be better not to be married at all.

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My aunt took a florin from her purse, and bade me run to the druggist's for — Balm of Gilead. While Mary cleaned out a bottle, I sat on the table that stands in the hall upstairs, and tried to stare the Empress Eugénie out of countenance.

I hated the sightless eyes, the haughty nose, the tidy hair, the queenly smirk, the superior air of that royal bust. I set my glengarry on one side of the Empress's head, tied a muffler round her neck, and hung my aunt's waterproof upon her shoulders. She remained serene.

"I will tweak her nose," said I, grimly.

The better to do this, I stood up on the table, and, holding on to the hat-stand, stretched forth an impious finger and thumb. In tweaking, I fell forward, and, falling, clutched the royal neck. The proud Empress thought it no shame to roll down the stairs with a schoolboy. At the foot her head leapt a yard away from the body, and, lying pensively on its cheek, stared at the ghastly trunk

### *The Queen of Beauty*

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which terminated tragically in a red woollen comforter.

My aunt's scream and Mary's rang in my ear as I banged the street door behind me, and, mastered by an instinctive impulse, ran for my life to the fair-ground.

As I ran, I pictured my aunt gliding from her room, pale and horrified, in her nightgown, and falling, a yellow corpse, on the headless trunk of her cherished piece of statuary. I felt sure that she would die of fright, or anger, and I said to myself sadly, with my fingers on the florin—"Of what use is medicine to the dead?"

There being no reply, I resolved to drink the cup of wickedness to the dregs.

I began with four long glasses of crimson fluid, and tendered my florin in payment.

"'Ullo, young 'un, been at the till?" said the man.

"No," I answered gloomily, "I have merely rifled a corpse."

"Wha—a—at?"



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"I made the corpse myself," I went on humbly.

The man grinned and slapped his thigh. I thought he might send for a policeman and put me out of pain, but he didn't. As I moved away, I heard him saying to some women—"As large as life, ses 'e, 'I hev rifled a corp.' Darn the Scotch skin ov 'im, 'e 'av jumped hout ov a needle-case!"

I would have given worlds to have been able to join in their honest laugh. Boots it to say how low I fell? I imbibed rainbows of coloured fluid, swallowed bergs of ice-cream, spread hot peas with vinegar on the snow, shot, gambled, and smoked. I sounded the deeps of iniquity with my florin plummet. A penny cigar saved my life.

Feeling very low after this rescue, with all my pride thrown out upon the green, my humbled fancy turned feebly to thoughts of love. I moved towards the Wild Beast Show where the Queen of Beauty reigned. I hoped that I might faint outside of it, and that her father

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might lay my wasted form, the wreck of her gallant lover, at his daughter's feet. Picturing the sweet pity in her eyes, I loathed lemonade, and longed for love.

Of my once princely fortune but five-pence-halfpenny remained. I paid three pence of it to the treasury through an embroidered pigeon-hole, and at the bottom of the wooden steps I stood in fairyland.

Sad-eyed camels poked their loose lips at me, an elephant shuffled past through the saw-dust at sixty miles an hour, as his rider said. I set a careless elbow on a case of sleeping serpents. The lip of a giraffe touched my ear and thrilled me with a sweet sense of danger. I crossed my legs indolently before the jaws of lions, tigers, wolves, and bears. I stood at the monkey's cage till Black Nero went in among the lions, with a beefsteak in his hand, and whipped and pistolled them to exercise before supper. And when, at last, the Queen of Beauty, flushed with dancing outside, appeared on the steps of the private residence

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that "gave" on the saw-dust, my crime was forgotten. I was drunk with delight.

But her father and Black Nero took a long pole between them and walked down the show pressing the spectators towards the door.

As they came on they cried—"Them as wants ter see the wild beasts feedin', jump under the pole. On'y sixpence. Kiddies arf-price."

The Queen of Beauty looked at me. Her eyes wooed me to stay. My soul was torn in pieces. I had only two-pence-halfpenny!

The inexorable pole moved onward, like fate, but I would not go. I leant confidentially towards her father and whispered, with a blush of shame—"Will two-pence-halfpenny do? It's all I've left."

"What? You young rip," he shouted, "yer mammy gave ye that money for me, an' ye've stole a 'make' of it! Out wi it, ye young thief, an' come under here afore I fetch the beak. Gi' me my money!"

### *The Queen of Beauty*

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I would have killed him, if he had not been her father. I haughtily handed the money to him, but the crowd laughed, and so did the cruel Queen of Beauty. The lion at his shin-bone, the bear at his slops, the pelican at his tub delighted me not. I was on fire with shame, and dared not look at my Queen. As soon as I could, I slunk sadly away, and went slowly home as the prodigal might have gone if a dead aunt had awaited him in place of an indulgent father.

Dead or alive, I knew my aunt would be waiting for me. She was there—at the top of the stair, grim as fate. I know not what demon entered into me—

“Keep calm, Aunt Jane!” I said, “The thing is done and cannot be undone.”

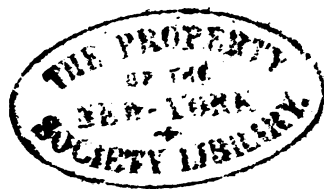
The good woman gasped. Then she bore me into her dove's nest, and used me as no woman should use a man-child. I do not care to speak of it. Since then poetry about a maiden's chamber has not appealed to me.

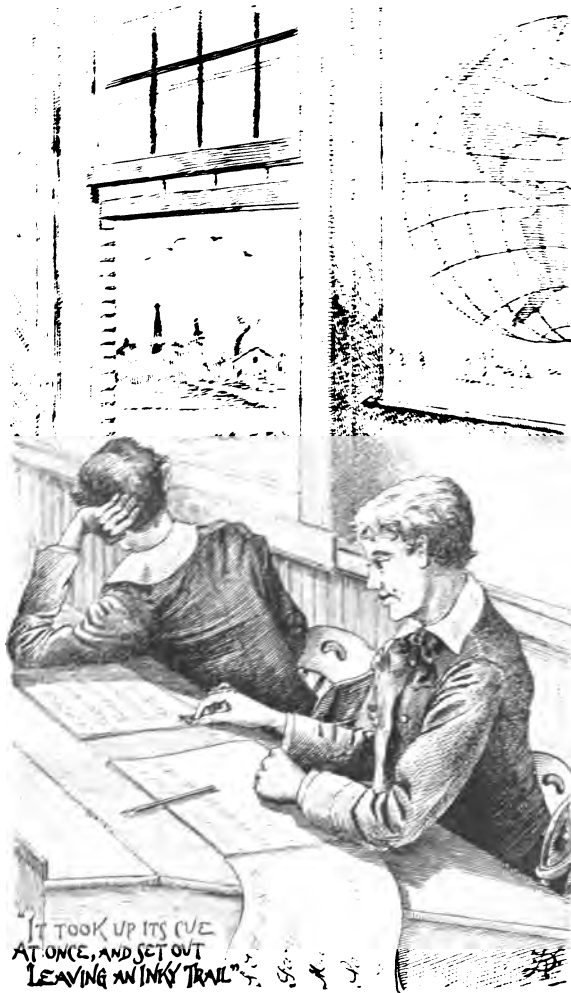
## The Fight in the "Coup"

THAT excellent book for boys, "Tom Brown's School Days," has one effect not always salutary. It inspires the boy reader with an eager desire to demolish a "slogger" as soon as possible after he has laid down the volume.

I had this feeling during the writing-lesson. It increased my contempt for pot-hooks and for the nagging dogmatism of the copy-book lines. The day was a melting one, and in writing I perspire. Therefore, in the middle of an upstroke I longed for an earthquake. Still, without one, life had its interests. A fly was struggling in my ink-bottle, and this refreshing sight awoke in me a feeling of the general friendliness of circumstances.

The efforts of the fly to rescue itself





IT TOOK UP ITS CUE  
AT ONCE, AND SET OUT  
LEAVING AN INKY TRAIL."

### *The Fight in the "Coup"*

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from drowning became monotonous, and I fished it up on the end of my penholder, meditating on the use to which I could put the life I had saved.

Long Phil sat next to me. Phil was the son of a Galashiels tweed-maker, and lodged in town to attend the Seminary. He apologised gently for his length by stooping a little, but his broad shoulders and bony hands put the idea of weakness on one side. His smile came easily and his eyes were friendly. He was slow to wrath and patient under patronage. I often helped him with his lessons as he was not "gleg at the uptak'," and so I took liberties and fondly dreamed that I could master him.

In front of Phil lay a page of copperplate, and his eyes were resting on the greenery in the terrace pleasure-ground. I put the dripping fly on the lower left-hand corner of Phil's page. It took up its cue at once, and set out, leaving an inky wake, for the upper right-hand corner. It was arriving when the tail of Phil's eye sought the master-piece



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which gave him the hope of a place on the prize-list. He raised his eyebrows, and peered closely at the fly, half-turning at my chuckle of delight.

But, like a softy, he did not kill the fly. He lifted it to the window-sill with a scrap of blotting-paper ; and while he was doing so, he was biting his lip and looking black.

"Did you do that, White?"

"Am I a fly?"

"Did you put that fly on my copy-book?"

My gorge rose. Was the man turning master? I had a fellow-feeling for Balaam. If Phil had grumbled or chaffed, I could have stood it ; but his eye was flashing and his tone was nasty.

"'Spose I did?" I drawled.

"Well, it was a shabby thing to do, and you'll be sorry for it yet."

Hoity-toity! Here was a high moral tone. But I had an uncomfortable feeling that I was nearly sorry already for what I had done. It was necessary for me to save my self-esteem by getting

### *The Fight in the "Coup"*

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very angry. Shabby? What would Tom Brown have said to such a word?

"Will you fight?" I trumpeted, as red as a turkey-cock.

"It's a jolly good licking you ought to get, but"—with a glint of pity in his eyes—"you're a very wee chappy."

"Are you 'henned'?" I leered insultingly.

Phil grew thoughtful, but his eye fell on the trail of the fly.

"I'll fight," he said.

"After school?"

"Yes."

"In the 'coup'?"

"All right."

I now had my "slogger" to pound, and was even with Tom Brown; but it is difficult to be quite happy in this world. I would have liked my victim to have been an inch or two less in height and to have had a shade less of resolution in his brown eyes. Mitchell and Carter seemed to have completely forgotten the beatitudes when they were invited to act as seconds.

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School was interminable that afternoon. It is nice to feel that, as a hero, you are expected to do great things, but you get restless and want to have it over. With cooling wrath, little heart-sinkings make themselves felt. You want to grasp your laurel wreath and hear the song of triumph.

But it warms the cockles of a boy's heart to think of what he can do with his muscles. Samsons are we all, in fancy. In imagination I fought starkly that day. Phil went down before my fist like a felled ox. It had been better if he had lain still. When he rose my left broke the bridge of his nose, and my right cracked his jaw-bone. I put many minor slights upon him, drawing first blood, blacking his eyes, and dislodging some of his teeth; and, finally, I laid open his skull. I looked upon these as merciful efforts to put him speedily out of pain. In theory it seems possible to finish a fight at one blow, and it is a capital way to avoid getting hurt oneself.

### *The Fight in the "Coup"*

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On the way to the "coup" after school, I was slightly upset when I heard Carter whisper to Mitchell—"My man 'll eat yours up."

"We'll get a ladder," was Mitchell's saucy reply.

The "coup" was a piece of ground on a lower level than the road, and over its edges rubbish was shot to fill up the hollow. In one corner of it stood a joiner's workshop on piles, and behind that we were safe from observation.

My nerves were high-strung, and I saw the preparations as in a dream. My heart beat high and my pride stood firm, but, to my disgust, I felt a little groggy at the knees. I did not remember that Tom Brown had been so affected. I set myself to hide the distressing and unexpected symptom.

Phil and I took off our jackets. The others formed a ring. We stepped into it, and shook hands in a dignified, disdainful way. Our seconds sank on one knee behind us, ostentatiously ready to

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repair the damages. Phil and I did not seem to share their keen anticipation of good things to come.

We solemnly put up our guards, and did nothing. This looked feeble, and, reflecting that the first stroke is half the battle, I charged the tower in front of me. Its foundations may have been shaken, but, somewhat to my surprise, it was still standing when I fell back again. Certain bony contacts had stung my own face, but Long Phil, though breathless, was unwounded.

Our fight was not on scientific principles. The rounds lasted till we had both had enough, and began again when we had recovered breath.

Phil stood quietly on the defensive. Three times I strove to put in practice my theory of destruction at one blow ; but vulnerable spots were all over me, and none could I find on mine enemy. Still, I hurt him somewhere, and he grew visibly angry. Like flails and hammers, his long arms and fists worked away till I was blind with pain and misery. They played

### *The Fight in the "Coup"*

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about my head as forked lightning might, while my blows simply rattled on Phil's stalwart chest. When the work was warmest I shut my eyes, and proudly stood to be pounded at. Rounds were forgotten, and we spurned sponges and seconds alike. We held back a moment for breath, then sprang in again and hit away for dear life. I took most of the hitting. The sight of my own blood made me drunk with rage, and I threw myself against the stinging blows that Phil with safety showered down upon me. He seemed set upon a rock, and I lost hope of over-throwing him. Neither did he ever get me to the ground, though often I was beaten near to it.

The cheers and the counter-cheers died down. Sympathy settled upon me. My very second despaired of victory. In gloomy silence the ring feasted its eyes upon Phil's prowess and my obstinate endurance. "It is magnificent," each was thinking, "but it is not war."

My knees were drunken, my fists limp as a baby's, my closing eyes peered out

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of a gory face. I was beaten, but I had no mind to admit it. My one idea was never to give in, my one fear that I might faint. I held my face up to the blows, and scarcely felt the pain. With shut eyes I pushed resolutely in on Phil. My persistence told. He was getting nervous and lashing out wildly. He could not have been so cruel if he had known what he was doing.

He has since told me that he wondered if the thing was to go on for ever. His air of discomfiture inspired my last rally. Broken and bleeding under the hammer, the wild idea came to me that I would get Phil's head into chancery. The savage in me rose to the effort. I caught his jacket with my right hand and sprang at his neck with my left. The event came off the other way. My neck was locked in Phil's left arm, and his knuckles were at my long-suffering nose.

But he didn't strike. He kept his arm about my neck, and, drawing me out of the ring, said—"I'm sick of this, Johnny. Are you not? It's a drawn

### *The Fight in the "Coupe"*

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fight, you chaps. Johnny and I are going for sticking-plaster."

Gratitude nearly burst the valves of my heart. My darling pride was saved. The tears came into my blinking eyes, as the fellows cheered old Phil to the echo.

Phil doctored my wounds, and had the courage, which was but coldly rewarded, to join me in telling the tale to my mother. It is many years since I have seen the good fellow, but I have heard of his doings. He has taken the world in his easy, masterful way. A wife, a "little place," and a big mill have fallen to his share. I am told that he means to have a fight for a seat in Parliament when they have found a man big enough to stand up to him.



## My Other World

I was an unhappy boy, but, as I took things calmly, it was thought that I had a cool enjoyment of life. My chief miseries were catching cold and feeling things. Striving to hide these weaknesses, I would break down in bronchitis or tears. When the actual pain of life, or the shame of feeling delicate, overcame me, it was my habit to flee into my other world.

I have always been a busy dreamer. I have played *Robinson* for days under a blanket stretched on chair-backs, a broomstick for tent-pole, the parrot (caged) at my elbow, and beside it a black sofa-pillow for *Friday*. In this retreat I would eat my dinner of rice-and-milk and taste the sensations of *Robinson*, even unto ague and the fear of death.

### *My Other World*

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So, too, have I lived the lives of *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy*, and *Cœur de Lion*. But this was the playground of my fancy in health.

When ill, or lonely, or heart-pinched, I threw my miserable life aside and was happy elsewhere. I would go about at times in an absent-minded way, my dreamy indifference to realities giving my friends serious concern. It seemed odd to them that a sudden calm, lasting for days, should come over an irritable child; and my mood of smiles, that came and went so mysteriously, puzzled them.

I can say definitely when the gate of my other world first opened to me. I had been staying with Aunt Jane, and her will had made raw flesh of my nerves. She had that day taken from me a three-penny-bit, and the triumph in her yellow face made me ill at dinner. I could not finish my soup, so I laid my spoon down firmly, and sat glaring through tears at my tormentor.

Aunt Jane took the laying down of my spoon as an act of mutiny. Her spirit leapt to the fray.

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"Sup up your soup!" she said.

"I won't touch the greasy stuff."

The maiden stiffened to her toes.

"The soup these hands made!" she gasped and rose. She tucked a fair white napkin into her waistbelt, removed her linen cuffs, and hitched up the sleeves of her gown. I would have run from the tragedy had my pride permitted.

Aunt Jane fixed my head in a vice, the jaws whereof were her left arm and her iron bosom. She forced the handle of one spoon between my teeth, and with another she poured the soup over my face and into her own lap.

When she let me go, I ran raging to the escritoire and threw an ink-bottle at her.

"You dare?" she screamed. "You beggar's brat!"

"Oh, missis!" cried the maid at the door as I shot past her, a white cataract of passion.

In the street I stopped, panting. Could it be true? Was my elegant father a beggar, and was I a beggar's

## *My Other World*

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brat ? I would write to my mother and ask her, and beg her to take me home lest I should kill Aunt Jane.

I wandered down to the level crossing with some thought of being flattened on the rail as I had often seen a pin flattened. Something broke as I sat on the top bar of the white gate waiting for a train to take me out of it all. The door of my other world flew open.

The night was grey when I went home again. Aunt Jane was sourly relieved to see me, but my happy face bewildered and annoyed her. From that day the gate of my city of refuge stood open, and I went in at will, leaving my shell without in the nagging world.

When I went through the gate first I saw little but green grass and a blue sky ; but my creative energy at work soon brought into being lakes, mountains, woods and streams. Then sprang up an unobtrusive city to hold the demon of loneliness at bay and court my carriage-wheels with its cheery streets. Yet, restless and ambitious little mortal that

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I was, I condescended to be lowly in my other world. Purity, sweetness, and romance were in the air of that world, and its one great law was the law of compensation. My vision was a kind of *Revelations* without finery. It left out sorrow, pain, and death, and took from earth only a little mild melancholy to give to the atmosphere a flavour of poetry.

I had in that world what I wanted in this. I cannot tell of all the joys that lay behind the mask of my dreamy face, but some of them have stayed in my memory. In a clearing in a wood without the town, I built me an house of timber and thatch. I thrill now with pleasure as I recall how I put each plank in its place, and how ingeniously I roped and nailed the structure together. I went on building for years and never quite finished the house and stables. In this labour of love I was helped by a band of clever, genteel and amiable boys, who lived to stay me with flagons of friendship and comfort me with apples

### *My Other World*

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of appreciation. They were my comrades in the wood and on a handy desert island.

We had a winter, that stories might be told in the firelight, and that provision might be made for skating and snow-balling. In our social circle were many pretty girls. One was my perpetual sweetheart born to feel, at times, but never to cause, pangs of jealousy. But, indeed, it was the chief end of everybody in my other world to glorify me and help me to enjoy myself for ever. Yet was I not proud, but of humble and courteous bearing towards all.

And, strangest of my strange luxuries, I had within the gate a little sister. On earth a small pink wonder of the kind had for six weeks filled me with delight, and to meet her, grown prettier and taller, in my other world did not surprise me. Her doings and sayings, her looks and frocks, and the joys that I heaped upon her, are they not set down in the books of my memory in letters of pure gold? For her I neglected my sweetheart and

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turned my back upon my comrades. Tell it not in Gath, that I kissed this sister of mine in moments of high friendliness or when she came to me in tears over some childish grief. Her figure, her face, her hands and feet, every trick of her manner and ripple of her smile are as real to me to-day as is the memory of a dead friend.

I have a notion that I am alive to-day because of the health resort thus provided in my imagination; and I am doubtful if even that refuge could have kept me from my cares had not the little sister, who died upon the world's threshold, come to life again to walk so vividly with me in my other world.

## A Game of Glances

It is when he puts his legs into trousers for the first time that a boy's fancy "lightly turns to thoughts of love." His heart must be looked for, not in his boots, but in his breeches-pockets. Another of his peculiarities is that his healthy hatred of girls is at its weakest point in church. It may be that girls look sweeter in a setting of piety, but, for my own part, I think that I sought shelter from the hailstones of theology under the drooping eaves of love.

Vainly the parson hammered at my soul. On the wings of original sin my spirit had flown away to the flowery fields of romance. Had I been older, its flight would have been in dreams, but a boy who has put on the legs of a man



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does not sleep. Yet I did not slip into the sweet slough of my own accord. I will not say that a woman tempted me, but a little seedling from the tongue of one took root in my heart.

We lived then in the country. Eva's family filled the front pew in the gallery of the church. Their name was not legion, but they were the thing itself. The fat, florid father and dark, tragic-looking mother had a mission upon earth—to raise a prize family. Eva should have felt lost among her brothers and sisters, but she sat as happily in the crowd as I did in the proud isolation of an only son. Her place was in the middle of the pew, as the prettiest stone is set in a ring. She was older than I, but no boy cares for a sweetheart in a bib. Her person was plump to earthiness, but her face, set in ringlets, and filled with blue eyes like heaven opening, was rapt and holy as the face of a saint. That is how it looked in repose. In speaking or laughing, the curls had tremours of happiness, shooting

### *A Game of Glances*

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stars of fun crossed the heavens, and the enamel of holiness cracked into dimples of mischief. In church it was a bee line from Eva's eyes to mine. But other than furtively I had not dared to take that line, if her grown-up cousin had not talked to me while my mother was settling her brooch and putting a little bandoline on her hair.

"And what is your name, dear?" said she,

"Johnny," I answered shyly, for she was fair to see.

"Why not Jack? That's much nicer."

"Mother thinks it isn't."

"Oh! a good little boy? You take prizes, read books, and go to church with mother? Happy Johnny! Jack would be often in scrapes. Now, tell me truly, Johnny, does Jack never get into you?"

I liked her arm to be round me, and out of my grey eyes Jack peeped so cunningly into hers that she blushed and drew away from me.

"I thought you were going to kiss me," she declared.

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"It was Jack's idea," I said, softly.

Her fearless laugh annoyed me. Did she think me a baby—in trousers?

"Do you know my cousin Eva?" she asked.

"I've seen her in church. She's good, with pretty curls."

"Oh, so Jack goes to church? Would he like to know what Eva said about him?"

"Yes."

"But you must keep it a secret. Promise!"

A secret! This made it worth hearing. I promised eagerly, and the mischievous girl whispered—

"Eva said—'I do so like to look at that boy; he has such a nice, evil-looking face.'"

My mother came in at the moment smiling. Had she known of our talk, there had been blood upon the mother-of-pearl paper-knife that day.

On Sunday the poison began to work. Eva's eyes met mine, and the ice was broken between our hearts at once.

### *A Game of Glances*

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The happy Sundays that followed ! I was a reformed character in my mother's eyes. I scorned the weather, and even took toothache to church with me to make it better.

When I would raise my head from the little entrance prayer, I would plunge into the heaven of Eva's blue eyes, where the stars were smiles. Salutes, almost as tender as kisses, passed between our eyes during every prayer. Sure as the church rose to some lure of theology or eloquence, Eva would look unutterable love at me. The parson played gooseberry to our wooing, his logic and his pathos serving but as sheaths for Cupid's arrows.

I was in love with a pair of eyes, Will-o'-the-wisps dancing over a strange morass. Deeper I sank at every step. I lived upon Sundays. The other six days were but poor lees in my cup. I spent the autumn nights roaming round Eva's house. Often I stood for hours in the plantation below it, peering through the trees at the lighted windows, trying

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to guess in which room she was, and what her little hands were doing at the moment. From the Lover's Lane, I could see the sun set behind the house, and when it fired the wood with glory and poured a crimson flood upon the great cupola, I beheld Eva transfigured in the midst of it as with the love that I bore to her. It is possible to be very romantic, in one's first pair of trousers.

So far in acquaintance had our eyes gone that when we met at a party given by Eva's parents on her birthday, my knees shook under me, and, at the touch of our hands, I felt that my collar was suffocating me. I stammered—"Are you quite well?" and very solemnly she answered, with her eyes on the carpet, that she was.

We danced together in a quadrille, but even our eyes had become strangers. Then we played in a round game of cards, and in my flustered condition I told the whole table that I hated playing with girls because they always cheated. This earned me a look of reproach, and

### *A Game of Glances*

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for the rest of the evening the heavens were veiled to me. Did I look at Eva, her lids fell at once ; and when her lashes were raised to take me in, I studied the roses on the carpet. We were even sillier than our big brothers and sisters would have been in the same case ; but it was so hard to meet, outside of a little girl at a party, eyes that had lived in my heart for months.

Pluck came back to us at the moment of parting. I squeezed her hand pathetically, and she returned the pressure tenderly. Our eyes, full of tears, embraced, and the blood churned in my veins. I stepped into the night, and fell over a flower-pot. Then I tripped on the border of the walk, and, between love and darkness, reeled over bush and bed to the gate like a tipsy man turned out of a tap-room.

Only once again did I meet Eva. On the day before we left for town, I was wandering disconsolate past the gate of the house on the hill. I think she must have been watching for me at the lodge

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window. She came out blushing prettily, her eyes downcast upon a bunch of forget-me-nots pinned to the breast of her jacket. We shook hands. She looked past me on the left. I looked past her on the right.

"Are you going away?" she said.

"Yes," I answered, catching my breath.

"I'm so sorry," and one little hand stole up to the forget-me-nots.

Oh, how I longed to ask for them, but the words would not come. She did not raise her eyes to mine. It was I who said—"Good-bye!" She gave me her hand, and she may have said the word, but so low that I did not hear it. As I went, she raised her eyes. They were wet, and the forget-me-nots were heaving on her breast. I was going nowhere, yet I walked stolidly away. She must have thought a boy's heart was a nether millstone. She did not see me in the wood.

## Dungeon Fever

I WONDER if the people who set the fashions know what they are doing. When, on that autumn afternoon, I whispered in Mitchell's ear I had no conception of the mischief that would result. We had grown tired of games, and were in that state of mental nausea when even eating palls upon a boy.

I had lost all my marbles, and when my last "commony" smote upon the others already gathered into Carter's fat leather bag, I turned to Mitchell and said—"This is rot!"

"It is poor fun," he answered sadly, wistfully eying Carter's bag into which his stock of marbles had also gone.

I drew him away from the affecting sight. "Come and talk," I said.



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"What about?"

"Oh, anything. We'll plan adventures."

"A fight with the Currie cad?"

"Bother—no! He's always there. Let's have something mysterious."

"A murder—eh, Johnny?"

"Nonsense. Who wants to be hanged?"

"But you can't have a mystery without a murder?"

"You can. You can have a bloodless one."

"D'ye know one, Johnny?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"There are dungeons under our house, pitch dark, with bones in them."

"Can we get into them?"

"Yes, through a window with a broken bar in it, that looks into the green. You can go right under the house and peep out at a grating in the front plot. No lord ever had finer dungeons in his castle."

"This is huge!" crowed Mitchell,

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"we'll have a rare old mystery, and drive the whole school mad. Let's go there now."

We went, and chose a dungeon. We spoke of its horrors freely, but with bated breath, and kept its location a secret. But we were watched by envious eyes, and seen to pass through the window. Still, the dungeon was ours and we swore to the fellows that if any one entered it without permission from us, his bones would remain there for ever. We allowed them to gaze respectfully into its depths; and now and then, under our jealous supervision, a foot trod its outer courts.

The school went thin with envy, till it occurred to some daring soul that other houses had other cellars under them. The idea was big with future energy. Exploring parties fared forth daily to prospect for dungeons through the neighbouring streets. The tables were turned upon us with wondrous tales of deep dark caves in the bowels of the tenements around. The rovers spoke of grated

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windows, barred doors, and creaking hinges ; of cells into which the light of day never came, and where, creeping in the darkness, they had heard eerie sounds and felt the touch of slimy things. Each party chalked its own dungeons, and as these were soon counted by the score, Mitchell and I were forced to go in for extending the business. We tightened our belts, and did the thing handsomely. Our brand was soon upon every cellar door, not already bespoken, within a half-mile radius of the school. In our burglarious raids we made our way into queer corners. By smashing locks, breaking stanchions, and picking out bricks, we sealed to our uses a wash-house, a wine-cellar and a lumber room. The playground had become a dungeon exchange, and we were the kings of it, with dominions as wide as the power of boasting went. With the contempt bred of familiarity we now called our possessions "dunnies," and an uneasy consciousness was stealing into our minds that, after all, these caves of mystery were only glorified coal-

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cellars. Our original find was the only one that kept the respect of the crowd, and it became our aim to heighten the feeling of awe in which this was still held.

We laid the foundations of a ghost in it, and when all was ready, it fell to me to "coax" little bleary-eyed Davie Glen through the window. When I had got one of his legs inside he kicked with the other as if it had been two, and when all of him but his head was in, he bit so that I could not safely follow him till I had rolled that end of him tightly up in my jacket. He was not easy to coax, but I knew that Mitchell had little patience. Red-hot from our controversy, Davie and I reached the foot of the long "dunny." At sound of the scuffle Mitchell lit the contents of the pill-box, and stood revealed, a spirit radiant in blue flame. He was draped in a long white sheet, with holes for eyes and nose, and I had thickly painted his nose with phosphorus. In the light this did not shew, but when the blue flame died down, the nose took up the tale and its pale

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glow set Davie screaming like a frightened hare. He ran like one, too, when I let him go ; and when Mitchell and I came out, we found him weeping among a crowd of boys to whom he was telling the awful things that he had seen. At sight of us he howled afresh, and it took an old knife and a cricket-ball to dry up his tears.

After this the other cellars, where no ghosts walked, were left to the rats and the rightful owners ; and our "dunny" became over-popular with the curious and the superstitious. We sighed for a lock-fast place wherein to conspire in real security against the world. Some of the cellars under our house had doors with locks on them, and we discovered that one of these was only seemingly fastened. We prized the door open, and finding a small closet into which no light came, we made a wedge to serve as a key, and moved our furniture in. We papered the walls with highly-coloured pictures of bloodshed. A pill-box full of gunpowder, a paper of squibs, an "amorice" pistol

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and two tin swords were laid ready to hand upon a wooden shelf. On an upright packing-case that served as a table stood a bottle of raspberry vinegar inviting us to midnight carousals, while the liquor was adequately flanked by a tin of sweet biscuits and a box of chocolate creams. Our faithful pipes, made out of nuts and straw, lay, like warriors taking their rest, in a box that had once held blacking. Farthing "dips" swung overhead in a wooden chandelier, and the skull of a sheep, torn from the soup-pot, was fixed as a warning to intruders upon the back of the door.

Here one day we were smoking "shag" and telling bloody tales, when one of us, who had suddenly turned a little sick, let his pipe fall among the straw. In vain we strove to beat out the flames that leapt fiercely up. We were forced to flee half stifled into the outer air. What a few newspapers and a little straw, helped by a pill-box full of powder and a packet of squibs, can do in the way of smoke must be seen to be appreciated. It rolled

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through every crevice in the floors above, and seemed to belch out of the front wall. We stood afar off and watched the quiet street going into hysterics. The people ran out of the houses with their jewel-cases clasped to their bosoms, and old Mr. Peacock, posing majestically with his kid gloves on, pointed excitedly at the fire with an umbrella as if directing heaven to put it out. The wild rush of the fire-brigade brought the enormity of our crime home to our minds, and the sight of a policeman sent us fleeing to the harbour, whence, failing to find a privateer fitting out for the Spanish Main, we wandered home in the darkness, Mitchell's good-night being—"Oh, Johnny, don't you wish you were a hippopotamus?"

## The Big Stake

BEING sick of life, I felt that Robert Mitchell was a very coarse, ordinary sort of boy to be a friend of mine. Critically regarded, he was inartistic. His cheeks were red, his tie checked, and his boots were not laced up to the top. At the moment there was a brown streak into the middle of his right cheek, the mark left by a Paris paving-stone which had gone into the interior. The huskiness of his voice placed it without the pale of gentility, and his immediate proposal was distressingly vulgar.

"Let's play dominoes," he said, lugging out of his breast-pocket a tattered paste-board box which contained his cure for all the ills of life.

Good-natured as I am, I lost my



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temper. With a neat drop-kick I sent the box spinning out of his hand into the middle of the green, where the dominoes lay in a cluster on the grass calling me to shame and repentance.

"Pick them up!" said Mitchell sternly.

I laughed a mocking laugh. "Sha'n't!" I answered.

"Toss you for it, then?" was the unexpected rejoinder.

The thin end of a smile forced itself through my solemnity. "Sudden death?" I asked.

Mitchell nodded. We spun, and it fell to him to pick up his own dominoes.

While he was doing this with a proud air and a gay whistle on his lips, the devil tempted me and I fell.

"Look here, Mitchell," I said cunningly, when he had again seated himself on his corner of the old forcing-frame, "let's go on tossing for things. It's high old fun."

"For what?"

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"Oh, pennies," I answered carelessly.  
"Have you any money?"

"Lots," Mitchell gaily proclaimed, fishing ninepence-halfpenny out of his waistcoat pocket and jingling it between his palms.

"So have I. Come on!" I had just one penny backed by a malignant certainty of winning.

My interest in life had returned, but I pretended to be merely passing the time.

I won twice; then for ten minutes fortune see-sawed so as to keep our hearts in our mouths, and then I found out that I could play with Mitchell as a cat plays with a mouse. I had discovered a system, and I set myself down to break the bank at my ease. Mitchell spun his coin openly, and it was evident that three times out of four when he sent up a Head it came down a Tail, or *vice-versâ*. My guesses were almost a certainty, while his, when I spun, had only a fair chance of being right.

In the grey light his last halfpenny

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soon passed over the bones of the old frame into my covetous grasp. His face lengthened with the shadows, and a twilight gloom stole into his smile as he began to realise the purchasing power that had passed from him to me.

I endeavoured to look much concerned as his fingers pursued their forlorn hope into the corners of his trouser-pockets.

"Are you rooked, Mitchell?" I asked feelingly.

He turned out the linings of his pockets, a few pathetic crumbs fell out upon the grass, and after a moment or two of gloomy cogitation, he said, "I've three-and-elevenpence in my 'pig' at home."

"Can you get into the 'pig'?"

"Yes, with the old bread-knife."

"How do I know you have a 'pig'?"

"As true as death I have!"

"Well, I don't like to see a friend quite cleaned out. I'll give you a lift, no matter what it costs me. There—I'll stake that against what's in the 'pig.'"  
I rattled the ninepence-halfpenny that I

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had won down upon the broad top sash of the frame.

To Mitchell it was ready money against a probable deposit in the Savings Bank.

A breathless moment passed, and then, as I guessed rightly once more, the contents of the "pig" became mine. Mitchell groaned as the value of the stake rose in his eyes, and he thought of the burglarious use that would have to be made of the old bread-knife.

"This is awful," he muttered, while my appetite for torture fed upon his sufferings.

"I can't go home," he went on—"I must win that money back."

"I won't run away. What more have you got?"

"My bank-book. With Uncle Willie's sov. it was seven-ten last birthday. But it's locked up in the *escritoire*."

"Can't you get it?"

"I might steal it."

"Fudge! One can't *steal* what's one's own."

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"I'd be skinned if I was caught."

"Well, don't be skinned. I'm going. When'll you get me my 'pig'?"

"Stop! I'll tell you what. I'll stake all these against the 'pig.'" He tumbled out of the pockets of his vest and jacket a knife, some marbles, a paper-sling, a "peery," a top, a roll of string, a chestnut pipe-bowl, a policeman's "birl," a cricket-ball and—the apple of his eye—a dried frog. Often had I envied him the last when a girl was near. I could not resist it.

We tossed again, and Mitchell's eyelashes were wet as he made up the little bundle in his spotted handkerchief and handed it to me.

"I should have kept the knife for my throat," he muttered.

"Bosh! You'll be Lord Mayor of London yet," said I gaily.

"A half-crown is needed to be that. I've nothing at all."

"You've your clothes."

A light leapt into his eyes. "Johnny,

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let me stake my clothes against all you've won ? ”

“ They're no good. I wouldn't be seen in them.”

“ You could wear them at the coast,” he answered humbly, “ or sell them to an old clothes-man.”

It was getting to be so dark that there was danger in tossing again. I couldn't see his penny clearly. But I was in a mood to take all risks, and the idea of letting Mitchell go off in his clothes was more than I could bear. It hurt me to think that he should have something left, and I have since learnt that this is how most rich men feel towards the poor.

I won his clothes, and I frankly own that I did feel a little uneasy as I watched him struggling with the lump in his throat.

“ Am I to strip now ? ” he asked.

“ Yes.”

“ Will you give me back my 'hanky' to go home in ? ”

“ Would your people not keep it ? ”

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It's pretty dark. Nobody would see you."

Mitchell shivered. "It'll be awful cold in the Lane."

I clapped my hand on his shoulder. "Try again," I said, "your bank-book against the lot. Remember Bruce and the spider!"

"Spin away," Mitchell hissed through his clenched teeth. We spun. I know I felt as if my life were wrapped up in the clothes I had won. To have lost them would have been to go out into the world naked again. But I did not lose, and Mitchell was most ungentlemanly about it. He flung himself down on the grass, choking back a sob with the sleeve of his jacket, and this, too, after all the chances I had given him.

"I want my clothes," I said sharply, and, as he made no answer, I began gently to unlace my left boot from his ankle.

"Keep off of me!" he roared, and very nearly broke my nose with my own boot.







OUR SCARED FACES WERE BENT  
DOWN OVER THE LIGHT WHICH TREMBLED  
IN THE DARKNESS LIKE AN UNHOLY FIRELY."

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"Do you want my skin?" he added. Then he sprang up suddenly, cap off, hair on end, face white, eyes like coals, and shouted—"So help me, I've something left. I'll stake my *soul* against your winnings! Now, John White, are you henned?"

My heart did beat faster, but he had kicked me and I was ready for the devil's work or anything. The sight of his white, drawn face made me long to crush him utterly. It was almost dark, but fear and caution were smothered in my passion.

"Coward!" he jeered, as for a moment I hesitated.

"I'll not do it in the dark," I said suddenly, mindful of the conditions of luck. With shaking hands I struck a match on the wall of the house. The night was as still as if the air had stopped to see us toss for a soul. Our scared faces were bent down over the light which trembled in the darkness like an unholy firefly. We were in dead earnest. Our eyes blazed, our knees shook under us; and

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at the supreme moment a mist came between me and the coin.

"Tails," I cried as the match fell from my burnt finger-tips.

"It's Heads," Mitchell yelled back.

"I saw a Tail!"

"Then it was the Devil's," and in the twinkling of an eyelid Mitchell was over the wall in my clothes. I heard him scudding up the Lane as one runs to save his soul.

After a night of fevered repentance, I made restitution to Mitchell of his worldly goods, but we have since had many a tough argument as to whether he can call his soul his own.

## The Passing of the White Horse

THE world, which bears so much from them, is slow to pity boys. Yet they can suffer. An ache of loneliness used to grip my heart at times when I was a boy. I have longed for a chum's arm about my neck when the grass was growing in the lanes, and the windows were in brown paper shrouds. Then the one person interested in me was the policeman who hoped for my development into a case. To the whole grown-up world I was, during these holiday-months spent at home, a dangerous "suspect."

On one particular sultry August day, this passionate loneliness almost drove me mad. Sitting on the wall of the back-green I tossed for crime or suicide. The penny fell for crime, and my

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spirits rose with the dignity of a tragic intention. They rose further when Charlie Irvine, crisp and brown from the sea-breezes, his battered straw-hat and stained sand-shoes telling of a good time gone, trotted up the lane. Such a veneer of happiness on another boy would have been an insult, but Charlie was the friendliest soul alive. He could smile at the Doctor after taking "twenty." Satan may have peeped in at his blue eyes, but the fiend never had a chance to look out. Yet, his sunny temper notwithstanding, Charlie was the greatest moral force in the school. It was the habit when one of us swore in the playground that the culprit should look furtively round and, seeing Charlie, should promptly say—"Sorry, Irvine!"

Till this August day I had seen little of Charlie. Some old friend's arm was always round his neck, and he had little chance to make new ones. Now, it was love at first sight with us.

"Hullo," he cried, "give us a hand up."

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In a moment we were seated side by side upon the wall.

"Where've you been?" Charlie began.

"Nowhere," I replied.

"What! Going soon?"

"To the country, in a month, I think."

"That's good. We'll have a high old time of it till then."

And on the spot we had a two hours' talk about the river steamers. Then I remembered that I had a crime to commit. I told Charlie how I was placed.

"Yes," he said, "you must do it. It would be mean to sneak out of it just because you're happy now."

"Could I kill a policeman?"

"I don't believe you could. Besides, there's his number. They'd be sure to miss him, and you'd be hanged, which would spoil our fun."

"How about setting fire to the Terrace?"

"No. Your own things would be burned."

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"Well, what's your idea of a crime?"

"I'll tell you. You mustn't do a mean crime, like killing an old woman, or that sort of thing. But, suppose you—break a window."

"Is *that* a crime?"

"Oh, yes, and it's quite easy. You can get it off your mind now."

And so, with Charlie's sling and one of his pebbles, I broke the window of old Peacock who loved plate-glass and hunted boys. If his head had been broken, he could not have made more fuss about it. The policeman grew thin over their stormy interviews, and made notes for hours at the corner with his helmet on the back of his head. From his sultry stare, Charlie and I knew that he suspected us. He took us separately and offered a free pardon for Queen's Evidence. My manner betrayed me, and my heart sank as he set my name and address viciously down in his book. There, so far as he knew, the case stood still. But during the day he seemed to

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dog my footsteps, and every night he "ran me in."

If Charlie had not been always with me, I think I would have bought peace of mind by going to prison. The secret knit Charlie's heart to mine. We knew that intimacy which lends charm to the association of well-meaning pirates and other honourable marauders. We became inseparable, till our thoughts flowed through the two minds as if they had been one. We did not need to talk. When one could see the other's face we thought in sympathy. It was a satisfying intercourse. We trusted one another down to the ground; and when we were together we were happy, if that is a possible state on earth. The trouble flew out of my heart when Charlie linked his arm in mine.

But he had such great faith that he tempted me, and I fell. I am uneasy to this day about the mean trick I played upon him when, lounging through the summer days together, I told him a three-volume story in penny numbers. I said



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the tale was "out of my head," and Charlie believed me. It was really one of Ballantyne's, and each morning I read up the portion I meant to tell that day. I revelled in Charlie's boundless sympathy with my genius and his artless prophecies of future fame. The story ended with a tag of verse :

"Then, adoo to the rolling ocean,  
And good-bye to the mighty sea,  
For there's nobody has no notion  
Wot a grief it's bin to me!"

and the wonder and admiration in the listener's wide-open eyes intoxicated me with a queer drink of mixed pride and shame. He must have found me out by this time, and I wonder what he thinks of the fraud.

Charlie could be very angry sometimes. A high spirit sat behind his simplicity. When you lit the spark in his blue eyes you felt in your spine what the soldier feels at the rattle of the drums. Mad Parker laid open his own brother's

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head with a stone one day, and waited for us with an open knife in his hand. Charlie alone did not stop to think. He took Parker's arm and coaxed the knife out of his nervous fingers. No fight came out of it, but you could see in Charlie's face that he was going through with the thing.

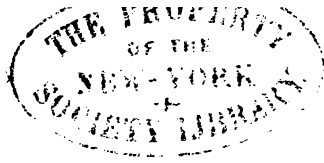
Once my conduct provoked the flash in his eyes. He and I were playing with his baby cousin by the low wall on the path over-the-way from the church. We heard shouting at the upper end of the short street, and, facing round, saw a crowd armed with sticks and pitchforks, chasing a dog that was foaming at the mouth, and had a broken rope about its neck. The brute may have been saner than its pursuers, but appearances were against it. Seeing us in the way, with the little bare-legged child, the crowd sent up a warning shout. The half-throttled cur made straight for us. It may have been petted by children once upon a time, and it had need of friends. Half-way up the wall, looking nervously behind me, I caught the gleam in Charlie's

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eyes. He did not say, "Come down," but I was by his side when he set the crying baby on his shoulder, and smiling kindly to her, with the small brown legs dangling on his breast, stepped out towards the dog. The danger was past in a moment. The cur, afraid of any human thing that came at him, swerved in at the church gate. The crowd gave Charlie a half-cheer as it swept by, but when the dog's carcass was thrown out at the gate, it had forgotten the boy and the deed. But I will never forget the feeling in my calves as I walked by his side. My reward was in his steady smile when it was all over. Since then when I am minded to make an ugly rush at the wall, I see those blue eyes with the flash in them and try to keep at my post.

That was a happy winter during which I was one flesh with Charlie. We discussed heaven and earth, and read, played and studied together. We laid plans for a summer of delight, and the quarrel that our friends looked for never came.



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One March night we talked late. We agreed to start as African travellers on leaving school. Next day I went with my mother into the country to pick up a little experience in travelling. I came into school with a glowing tale of adventure for Charlie's ear. He was not in the class-room and I was disappointed. It struck me as odd that the room should be so gloomy for the want of his face in it. None of the fellows looked up at me, and the whispering stopped as I came in. I caught Mitchell's glance. His lips trembled and he thrust his sleeve into his eyes. Then Carter frowned hard at me. "What's the matter, Carter?" I asked in wonder. He threw his head back and mumbled something, then plunged forward on the desk, and fought with his sobs. I looked round in alarm. Some boys were glaring at the ceiling, some were fumbling nervously with their books. Tears were in all the eyes that I could see. What could I have done to move the fellows so?

The Doctor came in hurriedly, more

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upset than I had ever thought to see him in this life. "There will be no school to-day," he said. "Some of you have heard? It is terrible, terrible! Charles Irvine and David Bruce, an Academy boy, were drowned in the river yesterday. They were on a raft and came near the weir. One of them sprang up, and they were both thrown into the water. Irvine could swim, but Bruce couldn't. They were found in each other's arms among the rocks below the weir. My lads, we shall miss Charlie! You may go now."

The Doctor's pink face was turning purple. He ran out of the room, and left us to scatter any way. So, even he had liked Charlie!

I sat on in the schoolroom, dreaming, with my hands in my pockets. I felt a little sick, which was the only sensation I had. I didn't want to move, or cry, or pray. I sat trying to think it out. I couldn't hope to see Charlie again, but why did I not miss him more? I went back over our friendship, and had stabs of pain for my conduct at every turn of

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memory. Besides these stabs, I felt only the sickness and a cord round my brow. I thought I would go to sleep, and wake up able to feel.

An arm stole round my neck. I shook like an aspen, never doubting that it was Charlie's. I held my breath and looked. I saw old Bob's red cheeks black with tear-channels. Neither of us likes to speak of the hour that followed. Mitchell may be rough, but when you need him he is there.

I did see Charlie again, and I will never lose sight of him till I die. God cannot send griefs black enough to cover up the mark upon my soul.

## Two Dead Rats

'Tis said that a man will live up to his coat. A boy does not always remember that he is wearing clothes ; but, as a manly boy, I was under the thumb of my tailor. With a torn collar, I was Satan ; and in my Sunday suit, I was a snobbish angel conscious of a finer palm-branch and a whiter robe than the others had.

I had been "down town" with my mother, and for the occasion had been arrayed in a new suit that fairly shone. It was so fine that I felt as if I had not come by it honestly. The velveteen, the glossy hat, and the new kid gloves expressed more virtue than I could conjure up at such short notice. Therefore, when one small boy cried—"Hi ! Stop

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thief!" and another asked—"Will it bite?" the old Adam stirred under my clothes, and I would have fought if my mother had been disposed to wait for the combat. But this was not her mood, and so I swallowed my pride, nourished upon which food my character began to rise to the level of my clothes. Thus sustained, I refused to come in and be disrobed. I set my back against the gate of the garden-plot, and with gloved hands dangling at my sides, I opposed a swelling chest and a face set in aristocratic gloom to the cold comments of a common world.

Davie Glen came along, contentedly munching a "fly-biscuit," which he held in hands black from playing "moshy" at the clay-pits. A friendly light peered out of his bleared eyes, and on his face was that grin which I can stand only when I'm very happy. "Hillo!" said he, "does your church go in on Saturdays?"

Davie never had a clean collar except for church. At that time his father was



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a shoemaker, and so hopelessly vulgar did he remain to the end of his career that when the Queen tried to knight him recently, he declined the honour.

"No," I answered curtly.

"Got toothache?" Davie asked sympathetically.

"No."

"What, then?"

"Nothing. Get out!"

Davie succumbed to my splendour and toadied.

"Ve—ry pret—ty!" he said, stroking me fearfully as if I had been a cat with claws. The common creature left some biscuit crumbs upon me.

"Leave a fellow!" I snapped.

Davie jumped back, and went and stood afar off nibbling his "fly-biscuit" and gazing fascinated at me.

Then Carter lolloped round the corner, with Watty Campbell holding on to the tail of his jacket and sliding after him. These two were "swells," with fathers in the Indian trade and the Inland Revenue. At times, one wore the kilt,

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and the other an Eton suit. Being gentlemen, they felt for me, but being rich, they treated clothes cavalierly.

Each nipped vigorously at that leg of me which was nearest to him. My pride and economy rose in arms, and Campbell sat down forcibly on the pavement.

"What's that for?" he growled, getting up with fists clenched. But Lowland caution cooled his Highland blood, and he moved off sneering—

"This swell doesn't know us. Let's go and put ours on."

Both boys then marched, with hands down and nose in the air, over to Davie Glen, and the three spent an agreeable quarter-of-an-hour in tying phantom neckties, pulling on imaginary gloves, and coquetting bravely with the mirrors of their fancy.

In the height of their fun, a whoop announced the arrival of Mitchell. At sight of me, his face shone like a harvest moon. He danced a Dervish dance in front of me, and the tails of his red

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woollen comforter played hide-and-seek in my eyes.

Mitchell was a vulgar boy. "Where did you steal the 'togs'?" was his idea of fun. In my attitude of easy disdain, my stomach was unduly prominent, and he punched me in it.

"Drop that!" I thundered. He whistled and inspected me curiously. I was strange in velveteen. My stare made him feel that he was in very coarse tweed. Satan squeezed my gloved fingers, and I held on obstinately to my insolent look.

The genial soul became sarcastic under it.

"Were you left out here to cool?" he asked. I hitched my nose up higher, and turned a glazed eye upon him. Under his red wrath, he made a gallant effort to look jolly.

"See here!" he cried, "it's a wax-work." And he began to wind me up with an imaginary key, suddenly hitting me a whack at the back of the knee-joints, and darting off as my legs collapsed under me.

## *Two Dead Rats*

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I could not give chase with dignity, so I set myself once more against the gate to survey the common world with the contempt it earns from the well-dressed everywhere.

My tormentors would not retire. They held a council of war, and it seemed to me that they hit upon the plan of illegal enjoyment under my very nose. Mitchell and Carter went foraging, and came back with a handful of nuts, a paper of "shag," and some straws. Knives leapt out, pipes were constructed, and, with the tail of my eye, I could see them lighting up luxuriously at the corner of the Lane. The striking of the matches stabbed me with envy. White puffs of smoke tickled my jealous nostrils.

Their talk was about me and sounded friendly. If they were melting, so was I. It was in my mind that my pride might possibly outlast the "shag." Therefore did I respond at once to the wagging finger and conciliatory speech of good old Mitchell.

"Come on, Johnny! I'll lend you my

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pipe." In a moment I was smoking the pipe of peace, with a humble and a contrite mind. After all, they were good fellows. I stuck to my kid gloves, but the world came into joint again as I grew sociable over my pipe. The four had considerably forgotten that I was not arrayed like one of them. They seemed to love me more than if they had not lost me for a time, and had clearly resolved to treat me with marked deference, of which they soon gave me a striking proof.

While I was smoking Mitchell's pipe, he was capering down the Lane, climbing walls and chasing cats. With his head in the door of an ash-pit, he sent up a shout of delight—

"Oh, Lord," he cried, "guess what's here?"

It surprised me that the others were not so much startled by his shout as I was. They may not have had my love of the mysterious. I ran, while they followed slowly, and the chuckles that I heard were, no doubt, caused by my

## *Two Dead Rats*

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grandeur. Mitchell shut the door with a bang just as I reached him.

"Who's my friend?" he said. "It's my show."

It cost me a little shame to say, "I am," and Mitchell's "Umph!" was not over-cordial; but he answered—"You're the biggest swell, any way, so we'll give you first peep."

The other fellows drew back deferentially, and it seemed to me that clothes had their value, after all. Mitchell threw open the door with a flourish. I looked in eagerly, and jumped with joy. A dead rat lay on the ashes. Large, lovely, long-tailed, it seduced my imagination with pictures of terrified girls and shrieking women. In my pocket was a string fore-ordained by heaven for its tail. Clothes and the world forgot, I thought only of how to get that rat and make it the scourge of the neighbourhood.

"Help me up, Mitchell," I cried. Willing hands were at my back. Poised on the sill, I remembered my clothes and considered how to get down daintily.

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Still considering, I shot head-foremost into the cinders and lay upon the dead rat, a thing as poor as he. I had been taken in rear by the blackest perfidy ; and when I crawled out of the ash-pit I was a stately ruin. On seeing me my mother sat down and cried. She should have rejoiced. I had cast my pride in the ash-pit, and two dead rats had found a common grave.

## Dicky-bird

HE was a small fellow, and odd-minded ; not clever, but having a soul overlaid with all the queer romantic sentiments and ideas that have tumbled about the world since the first sigh was breathed in Eden. These dropped so unexpectedly from his lips that he seemed to be an "original." Having no notion of fun, he was yet always smiling ; and, I think, looked upon himself as a strayed knight-errant who had wandered into the nineteenth century.

Dicky was an orphan, extravagantly envying us our fathers and mothers ; and as I had a mother, he tormented me to know what it felt like to have one. His two uncles were, to my mind, very jolly fellows, but they were case-hardened



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by prosperity, and could not understand the gentle, moony lad. They fed him ungrudgingly, but they delighted in rubbing his sentimental coat the wrong way to produce sparks. They loved him—as a good joke.

From the torture of their wit he would fly to our fireside, and would sit staring at my mother for hours, till she or I would give him a book to read or ask him if he didn't feel dull. Then he would blink his happy eyes and say—"I like just to look, if you don't mind." Sometimes, however, he would begin with nervous energy to amuse us by reciting "Lochiel," or "The Covenanter's Dream," or singing "Ta Phairshon had a son" to a bagpipe accompaniment on the sofa cushion. Then we would wish that we had let sleeping dogs lie.

The lad was little, but so lean that he looked tall. Over his big feet a gap of stocking was in evidence below the flapping legs of his grey trousers. He had generally no more than half the buttons that were his complement, and far up his

### *Dicky-bird*

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bony wrists were dingy bands scalloped by the hand of time. His face redeemed him. With his big blue eyes, long lashes, soft, indefinite nose, and yellow hair falling to the nape of his neck, he was like a lovable but untidy girl. He would have been ugly had it not been for his wistful eyes and gentle mouth. You might have thought him a genius, if you had not known that he was only Dicky-bird.

A tree, dangerous to climb, grew in front of the school windows. The Doctor had set the tawse among its branches, in which overhanging danger the romantic Dicky-bird found a special incentive to the adventure ; so that with much damage to his clothes and eager help from us, he sat astride one day at the lunch hour upon a lower limb of the tree, capless, his big nose and yellow hair suggesting to us the name that finally superseded the one he had got in church.

"Dicky-bird, dicky-bird, up in that tree,  
Dicky-bird, dicky-bird, come down to me!"

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we sang merrily, while the orphan boy on his lonely perch saddened visibly on seeing the Doctor throw up his study window.

"Who is that in the tree?"—boomed the fierce voice. Dicky knew that his large feet and grey trousers were in full view, and he must have lost his head for he chirped in feeble misery—"I'm Dicky-bird, sir."

We roared, the Doctor banged the sash down, and went away purple. Dicky dropped like lead out of the tree, and, during the rest of the play hour, sat among sympathisers rubbing rosin into his palms.

"Stand up, boys!" said the Doctor. "I want to see your legs." Then he tapped Dicky on one knee with the pointer. "Ah, those are your legs, are they? Make them take you into my room."

"Yes, sir."

"But, first, what is your name?"

"James Cuthbert, sir."

"We will see if we can stamp it on your memory, Cuthbert. Come!"

### *Dicky-bird*

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When he returned alone the Doctor had that air of repose which suggests "something attempted, something done." I obtained leave to go downstairs to wash out my ink-bottle, and there I found Dicky sitting on the stone floor with both hands under him.

"This is a very hot floor," he said drearily.

"The beast!" was my inconsequent answer.

"He said that if I was a canary, he would teach me to sing; but he didn't. Do you think he would fight me with pistols?"

"No, Dicky," I answered sadly, "he is too religious to risk his life in a duel."

Thus did Dicky get his nickname as by a baptism of fire, and the name clove to him.

The odd creature's ambition was to be an actor; and as he set traditional elocution at defiance and could make the simplest language obscure, he may have had the germ of great things in his

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histrionic style. *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Richard* were his favourite characters, and he made free use of their speeches in conversation. He was president of the Dramatic Club, and when it was arranged to give a performance in our drawing-room, he proposed a triple bill containing three of Shakspeare's tragedies. This large suggestion was at last whittled down to the Screen Scene from "The School for Scandal" chosen because we had a screen, and for the pleasure of hearing *Sir Peter* rap out—"Lady Teazle, by all that's damnable!" Dicky-bird cheerfully agreed to play *Lady Teazle*, and would have worn girls' clothes, but that we feared this might set the audience laughing. Dicky was to keep out of sight but it was arranged, that on the falling of the screen he should speak his lines in a sweet, low voice from the inside of a book-press.

The great night came and brought an audience of twenty grown-up friends who paid for admission. Amid some tittering, Mitchell, Carter and I struggled through

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our parts till the screen fell. Then the voice of *Lady Teazle* was heard throughout the land. Dicky had sat sweating and trembling in his corner till, at the decisive moment, he was seized with stage fright and lost control of his voice. *Lady Teazle*, nowhere to be seen, burst forth in a falsetto torrent that made the hair of my wig stand on end. This scream of agony from a disembodied spirit wakened up the audience most satisfactorily. A girl became hysterical, and above the din my grandmother cried —“ Bless the boys, what is it? Where is it? ”

We dragged *Lady Teazle* from the press by her long yellow hair and stuffed a powdered wig into her mouth, but still she squeaked as Mr. Punch does at the street corners, and the curtain came down upon a free fight over her body. The audience laughed till their sides ached, and my grandmother presented to the leading lady half-a-crown for voice-jujubes.

Dicky had a mind to play *Romeo* in real

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life, and he took for his *Juliet* my cousin May, who had a fair exterior. She had a pink face, much brown hair, seductive eyes, and legs and feet trim as a fairy's. But she was a sly girl, and vain as a peacock. I alone knew how bad her heart was. I had caught her telling tales of me, and had seen her stealing pennies from her sister's "pig." Therefore, she took relief in shewing her nature naked to me. Once she sat upon a stool and smiled at me.

"Let's play soldiers," I said, uneasily.

"I won't," she answered beaming.

"What are you staring like that for?"

"I am just wishing you would die now."

As a rule I did not heed girls' talk, but this made me gasp. I longed to slap her peachy cheeks, but I knew that she would then have had me sent to the kitchen. The sight of her white teeth made me think that they would gnash prettily in the next world.

And this was the girl whom the

### *Dicky-bird*

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gentle Dicky-bird loved. His first advance was made by pulling her back hair softly at the Bible lesson. She stood up at once and made a complaint to the Doctor. Dicky took his punishment without a whimper. It was part of the sweet anguish of love.

May thought him a bore. She was as sharp as she was cruel. But his worship was agreeable to her vanity; and she enjoyed his weekly income in exchange for little empty notes and, now and then, an even emptier smile. The smiles were pocket-money to Dicky, and he kept the notes to kiss them in secret. Pretty May often received his strange gifts, by me, with open contempt. She threw the cocoa-nut out of the window, and, happening to hit a policeman, tried to give me up to him as the offender. She grew excited over the stamp-book, the rabbit, the flint-lock pistol, and the chromo-lithograph, and made me tell the poor fellow that she only cared for "sweets." Then he took the three kittens from their basket in the cellar



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and sadly drowned them. I knew that he only gave such gifts when his money was all spent, and I was often minded to tell him what manner of idol he worshipped. But I was restrained by family pride and the conviction that he would not believe me. Had he come into closer contact with May, she might have shewn herself to him, but he preferred to earn her contempt by sighing afar off.

A tragedy broke off the love affair and ended Dicky's career in this country. His exit was dramatic. He had long hated the Doctor. The rigid pedagogue had no pity for the mooning lad. He seemed to take exercise in thrashing Dicky-bird, and the boy felt sore and hopeless. One afternoon, he and I stood in a doorway round the corner from the school. The Doctor came forth jauntily, swinging his cane, and thinking with smiles of his dinner. Dicky thrust his head out of the doorway, and shouted—"Thompson dog!"

The Doctor, black in the face, chased him to the top of the stair, and caught

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him just as he was trying to throw himself over the railing. He dragged him into the school, and bade me come to see what should follow upon such an outrage. He then delivered to us both a mournful lecture harder to bear than a thrashing, and when Dicky was reduced to tears, he became suddenly ferocious, and cried —“ Hold out your hand, sir !”

Dicky received there and then a vicious thrashing, and next morning he was vindictively expelled from the school. The effect was so awe-inspiring that the Doctor's right arm languished for want of exercise.

Dicky's uncles were astounded. They sent him off at once to Chicago, evidently viewing that thriving town as a reformatory for romantic lads. We corresponded for some years, and I keep his last letter as a curiosity in diplomacy.

It describes the delights of buggy-driving and sleighing round the country as “drummer” to a firm of druggists. It tells of tea-meetings and pretty girls in connection with a church. Thence it

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drifts round to May, who is spoken of with the gentle regret that the dead call forth, and the intimation is made in a round-about way that it would not be well for her to miss on his account any good chance of matrimony. The post-script hints that he may not write again, as his next move in life might not have my approval. And the letter ends with this sun-burst of confidence—"I am going to be married. Tell May, like a good fellow."

I did tell May, and when I had succeeded in bringing Dicky-bird to her recollection, she became spiteful. Having a husband and three children, it seemed to annoy her to lose a sweetheart in Chicago, of whose existence she had been till then unaware.

## The Last Penny

THE March winds had swept into April. Clouds of dust raced past the window, and you could hear the wind tearing ill-naturedly down the Lane. It was the sort of weather that creeps under doors and through button-holes, and chills and worries the blood in your veins.

The fire had shrunk with the cold, and its light was dim upon the page that spoke to me of cream-cakes, sherbet and fountains. Daylight, too, was going, as tired of hanging about in the chilly air.

I sat doubled up in Uncle John's rocking-chair. My mother, white and nervous-looking, came in and stood by the fire. By the knitting of her brows and the earnestness of her face I knew that something was troubling her. Since

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the death of her mother, she and I, and old Marget, had been trying to cover a year of unlimited length with a very limited income. I had not spoken, nor had she, but for months each had known that the other feared the money would not last till the Term.

I had been ill in the winter, and my mother had been reckless in dainties. When better, these good things haunted me. I knew that the colour in my cheeks had come out of some one else's. But I was hopeful, and the burden began to roll from off my heart as the day of relief drew near. My mother, fearing to let worry stay my returning health, had answered cheerily to my plain question—

“Don't be afraid, Johnny. It will last, or we will get more somewhere.”

Looking up from “The Arabian Nights,” her drawn face alarmed me, but on that steel-cold day everything was shrunken.

“Anything wrong,” I asked cheerfully —“headache again?”

### *The Last Penny*

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"A little," she said, and sat down heavily.

"Go and lie down, then."

No answer. I went back to the *Fair Persian*.

"John."

"Well, old lady?"

I saw tears gather in her eyes. She bit her lip, moved her hands nervously on the table-cover, then let her head fall upon them and cried.

I had not often seen her cry. Her simple courage had always been my envy. She did not break down over headaches. I did not do or say anything tender. It is not looked for in our family. We cannot express our good side. I sat still, my heart in my throat. Then cried—

"Mother, what is it?"

She lifted a wet face to me, lips trembling on the verge of another breakdown, and opening the palm of her thin hand, showed me a penny.

"The last, Johnny. We haven't another," and her head sank again upon her hands, but no sobs came.

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"Mother, do you mean that that is all our money?"

"Yes," she replied stonily.

"A penny!" I cried, not in fear, but in shame that our last coin should be so paltry.

Then a thought came. "There is my bank."

"Oh, Johnny, I have used that. Please don't be angry. I knew you would give it to me, but I didn't like to speak to you."

Our nakedness began to come home to me.

"You should have told me sooner," I gasped, "I thought we had plenty."

"I hoped it would last. I don't know where it went. Oh, I didn't waste it, Johnny. As I shall answer to God, I didn't waste it."

"Mother, don't cry so. I can't stand it. I know you spent it on me. But don't cry. I have to think, and it makes me stupid."

My mother's faith in me has always been unreasonable. She grew calm, and

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sat looking downcast, but waiting for my plan.

And plan I had none. The wits of a lad of thirteen, brought up without a want or a care, are not clever in expedients for raising money. As my thinking had no fruit I became hot and angry.

"It's not quite fair," I said, "I should have known of this long ago."

"Don't, Johnny, please! I'm nearly mad as it is. My head is turning round. Oh, I wish I was dead and done with it."

"But to know we were coming to *this* and never tell me!"—I flicked the poor penny from the table to the floor—"Mother, what were you thinking of?"

"I left it to God. I was sure He would send us something, and He will. Johnny!"

"Well?"

"You'll go in to Mr. Scott, and get ten pounds from him, out of my capital?"

"But, don't you remember, he said every penny of it was locked up?"



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"He can lend it, and pay himself at the Term. We'll give him interest. We must get bread."

"And next half-year, if it's the same?"

"We must use some of our capital. When you're a man, we won't need it."

"Mr. Scott said he would never let you use a penny of it. But I'll go and see him. There's nothing else."

My mother tied the big scarf about my neck, brought my warmest gloves, and, heedless of the east wind, wistfully watched me from the doorway till I disappeared behind the dairy at the corner.

I was very hopeful. The keen wind blew upon my excitement like the breath of a fan on a furnace. I didn't see how Mr. Scott, as a reasonable man, could refuse.

Still, I was very nervous as my boots clicked on the tiled floor of his office. The clerks turned their heads to look at me, but seeing so little, no one of them moved from his stool. The nearest to the counter said—"Well?" in a most discouraging tone.

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"Please, is Mr. Scott in?"

"Yes. He's in."

"Can I see him?"

"*You*, and who are you?"

"I'm John White."

"Is that possible?" said the young man, and all the others laughed. Then, seeing me redden with anger, the wit thought he had gone far enough, and added—

"Mr. Scott's busy. What do you want?"

The consciousness of what I did want nearly choked me with shame.

"I can't tell you, sir. I must see Mr. Scott himself."

"Must? That's pretty cheeky for your size. But, in you go. The door over there! If you *must*, you know, but I'm sorry for such a small chap."

This raised another laugh that tingled in my ears as I knocked at a door on which was printed—"Mr. Scott."

"Come in—can't you?"—a fierce voice cried.

My heart was in my boots as I accepted

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the kind invitation, and stood before a dark, bilious-looking little man, whose side-whiskers seemed to have been partly plucked out in fits of impatience.

"Who's this?" said Mr. Scott, half-rising from his seat to get a better view of me.

"I'm John White, sir."

"White? White? What White? Ah-h! Now I remember. How's your mother? She's not ill—eh?"

"No, sir, she's quite well."

"Why did she send you here then?"

To my own ears my voice sounded like an echo, but I got it out.

"Please, sir, our money's done, and we want you to lend us ten pounds—of our own, sir—till the Term."

"'We'—'Our'! What money have you? I looked for this. I looked for this. Why didn't the foolish woman come herself?"

My wrath arose. "She's not foolish. She spent the money on me. I was ill. I think she was afraid of you, and I'm not."

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"Spent it on you, did she? A mighty fine investment! What do you think's to come of your mother when she's spent all her capital on you?"

"I'll work for her."

"You midget! I doubt if you'll live, and, if you do, it's ten to one you'll break her heart and let her starve. No, my bold boy, she won't trust to a son while her money's in my care. I have the trustees' instructions not to let her touch the capital, and I won't if she gets to her last penny. Tell her what I have said."

"But, sir, we really are at our last penny. I can't go back without money."

Tears of shame were in my eyes and my voice was breaking as I spoke, but Mr. Scott had taken up his pen again and his harsh—"Now, go, and tell her that," followed me as I went out too sick to see the grinning clerks.

I stumbled home, my chin on my chest, humbled, helpless, beaten. All the way I saw in front of me my mother's face and that cursed penny. I was

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afraid to go home, yet, at our corner, I found myself running. My mother must have been standing behind the door. It was opened before I had time to ring. I ran past her into the parlour without speaking. She came quickly to me. Livid with passion, I burst out—"Damn that old brute! I hope he'll die to-night."

"John, what are you saying? Oh, tell me, would he not give it to you? You don't know what it means. We must starve."

She knelt on the rug, pulling my hands away from my face, and looking as piteous as if I were refusing her the money. At that moment I would have killed myself to put ten pounds in my pocket.

"Don't make it worse," I cried. "I've got nothing."

"Did you see him?" she asked gently.

"Yes. He called you a fool, and said I would spend your money and let you starve."

My mother smiled. She rose and put a hand on my shoulder. There was so

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much in that touch that my frame trembled under it.

"You don't think I would do that, mother?"

She picked up the poor penny. "It's not our last in the world," she said, "but if it were, I would rely upon God—and you, Johnny."

"Mother, you will never want anything that I can work for. I'll go to your trustees to-morrow and *make* them give us money."

The bell rang loudly. We listened breathless, our nerves so tense that it seemed to us as if God might interfere. My mother opened the envelope that Marget brought in. Notes and a form of receipt fell out of it. There was also a letter from Mr. Scott, but I took it from my mother's hand and flung it in the fire.

"We will never ask him again," she said.

"We won't need to. I will go to work. I'll buy a paper with this penny and reply to every advertisement for a boy."

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"It should be for a 'man,' Johnny. I know you are one."

I had the feeling, as she spoke, of being knighted on the field. Since then my mother and I have never been so near to the "hard pan" of life, but when we have had to come through things, we have rested on the faith in one another bought with our last penny.

## The Light Steadies

THE lantern-gleam that memory throws into the past dances and flickers. It is a dim light and restless, but it steadies, as of habit, and brightens when it falls on my mother's face. Dare I try to make a sketch—a shadow-sketch—of that gentle soul? My hand trembles as his may that lifts a tool to shape a crucifix.

Through my grandmother's spectacles I can see a little maid, of dainty form and thoughtful mood, growing up in a houseful of brothers, with few girl friends and as much knowledge of the world as may be taken from boys' chatter. The boys' friends are her friends, and as their legs lengthen many of them make sheep's



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eyes at the pretty daughter of the house. I am always touched when I hear of old men scattered about the globe whose young emotions shed their down at my mother's feet. It fell unheeded at the time, but it lodged in the secret corners of her heart, and makes trouble sometimes when an old name, with a sad story to it, comes suddenly above-board.

I have several photographs of a grave, stern-looking woman that the sun would foist upon me as my mother. I will none of them. The rigid pose, the Lady-Macbeth-like scowl, are the outcome of tremours in front of the lens, but here is an old daguerreotype that better tells the story of her youth. The coming seriousness of my mother's character is already stamped upon the young face. Life to her has always been real and earnest, a slip into light-heartedness having ever in the background a looking for of judgment. The suggestion of this mood in the picture sets in relief the youth and happiness of the face. With parted

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lips, glowing cheeks and eager eyes, the young girl seems to have paused to think in mid-step upon the threshold of womanhood. The portrait comes out of a bright belt in a grey experience. It was taken during a visit to a gay seaport in the South of England, at a time when love lit my mother's path and kind friends pressed about her. The sunshine, the music, and the flashing uniforms of the port made a stirring interlude in the girl's sober life. Her share in the gaieties of the place must always have been a reluctant one, for it was during this English trip that she fled in affright from the door of the Crystal Palace on Sunday, and was found on her knees in church seeking to expiate the sin of intention.

I infer that this was the time of love from a scrap of circumstantial evidence that tells me as much as a volume could. This is an old yellow envelope which bears certain postmarks, and which I found in the drawer of a discarded work-table. In the envelope is a sprig of heather almost

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mouldered into dust, and on the torn flap is written in my father's airy style—"Whose heart's in the Hielan's?" and—mysterious Pickwickian query—"What did you think of the 'dooking'?"

I know little of what came between my mother's early marriage and my father's sudden departure from the land that loved him; but I can imagine that miseries must have been endured, and it still breeds an ache about my heart to think of what the interval may have covered.

I pass by this eerie place, to find myself, a little lonely lad, trotting by my mother's side through many a trying year. We were never far apart, and I made her the "Encyclopædia Britannica" of my dawning intelligence. Strangers often troubled me by asking curious questions about my father. In answering these I came to look upon myself as my mother's champion, and the blows that I took from the world to shield her were like caresses to my pride.

### *The Light Steadies*

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What need to tell the story? A mother's care, devotion and self-sacrifice have always seemed to me to be the feeding of the young with the life's-blood. The anxiously cared-for lad grows strong and manly ; the mother's eyes become more wistful, her strength is feebler in service, and the life so freely spent calls for the most chivalrous care to keep it within reach of the love that it has nurtured.

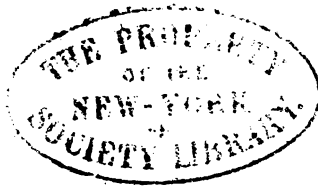
My mother has played the game of life badly ; but she is sustained by a creed of gentle fatalism which says—Do the right : the issue is not with us. I am awed by her contempt for the success which I so keenly covet. So fragile is she that a breath might blow her away, but her sheet-anchors are out in eternity and she has proved that she can ride bravely through the stiffest gales of fortune.

There are too many inducements to be good. If each of us could but see his mother's face at a window in heaven, it were lure enough to draw him from sin.

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Just to take the worn hands again and say—"Well, mother!" Ah, if hearts can be so full in heaven, tears must be there.



The Anglo-American Publishing Co.'s

## Announcements

AND

## New Publications



\*• The books mentioned in the following list may be obtained of any bookseller, or will be sent, post-paid, on receipt of price by the publishers.

# THE Anglo-American Publishing Company's New Publications.



## The Last Sentence.

By MAXWELL GRAY, author of "The Silence of Dean Maitland," "The Reproach of Annesley," "In the Heart of the Storm," etc. Illustrated by A. G. Reinhart. 12mo, cloth, \$1.50.

"A story strong in plot and character-drawing, rich in the accessions of an abundant imagination, and its central movement has a psychological potency that it would be difficult to match in the writings of any novelist since Hawthorne. 'The Last Sentence' may be, without reservation, accepted as one of the really significant novels of the year. It will bear more than a single reading and its merits are more likely to be appreciated at a third than a first perusal."—*Boston Beacon*.

## Oriole's Daughter.

By JESSIE FOTHERGILL, author of "The First Violin," "A March in the Ranks," "Healey," etc. 12mo, cloth, \$1.25.

"Like all Miss Fothergill's books, it is charming reading."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"In fine, 'Oriole's Daughter' is a book which will maintain the author's reputation for refined portraiture and sound workmanship."—*Athenaeum*.

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